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UTOPIA AND PESSIMISM IN PLATO´S REPUBLIC

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Orientador: Prof. Dr. Lucas Angioni

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A Comissão Julgadora dos trabalhos de Defesa de Tese de Doutorado, composta pelos Professores Doutores a seguir descritos, em sessão pública realizada em 22/01/2021, considerou a candidata Natalia Costa Rugnitz aprovada.

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"The Republic *is a chimerical, naive piece of speculation, a mere work of literary fiction, which should not be taken seriously because it is not the product of rational exercise but an expression of wish-thoughts"*

BRUCKER, J.

"Plato is called a hopeless idealist, a dangerous idealist, a profound idealist (...) but his own denunciation of impractical idealism is left out of account"

BURNYEAT, M. F.

ABSTRACT

This work addresses the controversial issue of the utopian nature of Plato's *Republic*. My thesis is that it is legitimate to consider the *Republic* as the founding utopia in the history of Western literature only if it is considered, at the same time, as the first critique of utopia in Western literature. I suggest that the *Republic´s* several paradigms are counteracted by pessimistic dramatic gestures and philosophical theories, and that this is the core of the criticism at stake. In the first chapter I concentrate on the dramatic use of mockery and ridicule as strategies to stop and refrain certain naive and optimistic positions advanced or insinuated by Socrates concerning human motivation. We will see, here, an implicit pessimism. In the second chapter I observe how Socrates, while constructing positions of a more refined optimism, expounds—in parallel way— properly philosophical theories with a dense and explicit pessimistic content. I try to highlight this content with special emphasis on the Theory of the tripartite soul and the Allegory of the cave, in order to show two main points. First, the Theory of the tripartite soul suggests a vision of human interiority in which the internal conflict between the parts of the soul is inevitable and, consequently, the optimal psychic state is unattainable. Second, the Allegory of the cave suggests a vision of human reason in which the knowledge and communication of the idea of the Good escapes human intelligence, even for the best endowed and educated souls. I suggest that, for these reasons, the ideal of the philosopher, i.e., the ideal of self-control based on reason, is of doubtful and improbable attainment, and, consequently, the same applies both to the ideal of the philosopher-king and to the *Kallipolis* under his regency. In the third chapter, I concentrate on the phenomenon of pessimism, trying to expound its philosophical roots with attention to the secondary literature that examines it in the broader context of Plato's thought, especially the *Republic*. I conclude that, far from constituting a paradox or a contradiction, the *Republic* is, in this specific context, an exercise in no way conclusive, but intentionally open. Its main message lies rather in a methodological recommendation relative to the search for a better life than in a definitive prescription or an equally consolidated path for its realization. Plato embarks on the construction of the ideal, but invites the reader to perform a serious critique of that very ideal based on an exhaustive and philosophical consideration of the limitations of experience, presented in all their adversity. Plato also invites the reader to engage in a positive action in relation to the ideal, not in the sense of its final and absolute realization—which is assumed, within the work itself and in the antipodes of traditional utopian writing, impossible and even undesirable—, but in a sense linked to resilience, focused on minimizing harm and heading towards a limited, but still possible progress.

Keywords: utopia; pessimism; idea of the Good; optimism; moral psychology; resilience

RESUMO

Este trabalho se insere na polêmica a respeito do caráter utópico da *República* de Platão. A tese é que só é legítimo considerar a *República* a utopia fundadora da literatura ocidental, se a obra for considerada, ao mesmo tempo, a primeira crítica da utopia da literatura ocidental. Diremos que os diversos paradigmas ali expostos são contestados por gestos dramáticos e teorias filosóficas abertamente pessimistas, e que este é o cerne da crítica em questão. No primeiro capítulo, nos concentraremos no gesto dramático em que a zombaria e o ridículo são utilizados como meios para impedir certas posições ingênuas e otimistas de Sócrates em relação à motivação humana. Veremos aqui um pessimismo implícito. No segundo capítulo, observaremos como Sócrates, ao mesmo tempo que constrói os diversos paradigmas, desenvolve, paralelamente, teorias propriamente filosóficas de conteúdo pessimista denso e explícito. Tentaremos extrair esse conteúdo colocando especial ênfase na teoria da alma tripartida e na alegoria da caverna, com o intuito de mostrar como nelas se desdobra uma visão (i) da interioridade humana em que o conflito interno entre as partes da alma é inevitável e, conseqüentemente, o estado psíquico ótimo, inatingível e (ii) do conhecimento, no qual a compreensão e comunicação da ideia do Bem escapa à inteligência humana, mesmo para as almas mais bem dotadas e educadas. Diremos que, por esses motivos, o ideal do filósofo, isto é, o ideal do domínio de si com base na razão esclarecida, é de consecução duvidosa e improvável, tornando assim duvidosa e improvável a figura do rei-filósofo e, portanto, também da *Kallipolis* sob sua regência. No terceiro capítulo, nos concentraremos no fenômeno do pessimismo, procurando expor suas raízes e percorrer a literatura secundária que o situa em relação ao pensamento platônico, em especial o da *República*. Concluiremos que, longe de constituir um paradoxo ou uma contradição, a *República*, neste contexto específico, apresenta-se como um exercício sem pretensões conclusivas mas intencionalmente aberto, cuja mensagem reside antes em uma recomendação metodológica relativa à procura da melhor vida possível—mas não em uma norma definitiva ou uma proposta igualmente consolidada para o seu empreendimento. Platão embarca na construção do ideal, mas convida simultaneamente a uma crítica desse ideal a partir da consideração exaustiva e filosófica das condições da experiência, apresentadas em toda a sua adversidade, bem como a uma ação positiva sobre tal experiência em direção ao ideal, não no sentido da sua realização final e absoluta, que se assume, no interior da própria obra e nas antípodas dos escritos utópicos tradicionais, impossível e até indesejável, mas em um sentido vinculado à resiliência, centrado na redução de danos e orientado a um progresso limitado, embora possível.

Palavras-chave: utopia; pessimismo; Ideia do Bem; otimismo; psicologia moral; resiliência

SUMÁRIO

INTRODUCTION

"What else did Plato express in his *Republic* but the hope that a perfect human life could be achieved?"[1]. This question synthesizes and embodies a misleading, if not openly superficial and wrong, interpretation of the *Republic* which, despite that, is not uncommon in the exegetical tradition or easy to refute. The idea that the *Republic´*s content consists fundamentally in the design of a political organization whose institutions assure that there is no injustice, war, poverty etc. and of a set of "advices" or "instructions" on how to bring it about, is as widespread as it is debated, especially since the second half of the XXth century. This thesis is located in the context of such debate and can be conceived as a reaction to this interpretation; thus, its claim can be roughly formulated as an answer to the above question. The central claim is that the *Republic* is a peculiar utopia, whose main particularity resides in putting us to *recognize* the virtues of the paradigm (which, in fact, it proposes) but simultaneously to *hesitate* about that very paradigm. We will state that to call the *Republic* a "project" is misleading: the *Republic* is not a project, much less a "project of perfection", but a *hypothesis*, ever-open to *theoretical* consideration, on how to cope with the adverse traits of our condition – that is, human condition – both from the point of view of individual and of social experience, not in order to eliminate them, but to reduce harm and suffering as far as it is possible. In this line, one of the *Republic´s* most important messages – a message that might seem trivial, but that is not – is, precisely, the opposite of what is usually believed, and has to do with the awareness that perfection is unattainable and, strictly speaking, inconceivable. This does not, however, undermine the fact that the dialogue stirs hope in the reader. But it is a philosophical hope, in the sense that it is born out of a serious consideration, and assimilation, of the "boundaries of perfection". This does not exclude, as well, the protreptic impact of the dialogue, but implies an exhortation to betterment that leaves aside any ultimate promise of stable and durable virtue and happiness.

For example: the *Republic* strives to, and succeeds in, showing how and why rational activity is a precious power: from the psychological point of view, for instance, reason can influence, under certain conditions, desires and emotions which, if left to their own, are a

1 DIENSTAG (2009), p. 263.

source of conflict and psychic fragmentation, and, thus, of a very specific discomfort that plays against the well-being of the individual; however, on the other hand, to trust that intelligent activity is capable of resolving ethical dilemmas in an absolute and conclusive way is wrong, and even ridiculous (and Plato uses this expression); it is to place too excessive an expectation on rational power: intelligence is capable of knowing and giving an account of what is better and what is worse, but, when the time comes, it is not capable of knowing or explain what the Good is.

From the political point of view, organizing a society around knowledge is not presented as a panacea, but as something that has important paradoxes and budgets. For example: if against all signs, by a gift from the gods (and Plato, again, uses this expression) an individual capable of knowing and explaining what the Good is could come to exist, if that individual could reach political power (or, the other way around: if someone who already has political power could reach knowledge of the Good) and if the mass under his regency, while being incapable of such a contemplation, could somehow grasp the significance of his advice so that the *Kallipolis* comes true, then the result would not be general fulfilment: the ruler would be deprived of entirely enjoying the intellectual contemplation of the Good and the ruled would be shaping their lives in view of values that they cannot fully understand.

By means of this type of manoeuvre the *Republic* communicates (in fact, for the most in a very explicit way) that it is not a matter of achieving perfection, but of dealing with existing problems by approximating to a paradigm that has a considerable resolving potential, still carrying its own difficulties and costs. This type of manoeuvre, we will state, displays a contrasting movement between utopia and pessimism.

The aim of this work will be to shed light on this movement between utopia and pessimism. We will argue that there are two main ways in which Plato curbs the utopian impulse through pessimism in the *Republic*: by indirect means, mocking at naïve or exaggerated assumptions that bend the argument towards directions that make it look more like wish-dreams than philosophical elucubrations, and by direct means, explicitly developing positions that expound a heavy pessimistic content, which acts as a counterpoint to the promising status of the model being built.

In the first chapter we will focus on Book II and explore the design of the so-called "First City", which we will regard as the first utopian paradigm offered in the dialogue and define as an evasive one, as long as it presupposes implausible inhabitants and tries to do without what, in other parts of the dialogue, is said to be a basic characteristic of human soul, namely: the desire for sensible satisfaction. We will pay attention to the theoretical

abandonment of this city, remarking that it is performed by means of mockery and suggesting that this mockery arises from a pessimistic soil. When Glaucon calls the First City a "City of Pigs", he is humorously reacting to Socrates´ naivety of presupposing such unlikely characters. Glaucon implies that Socrates´ proposal is unsatisfactory because it portrays human beings not as they are, but as one would wish them to be: indifferent to pleasure and comfort. The implied pessimistic claim here is precisely that human beings *are* motivated by the search of comfort and sensible gratification and that this, even if it brings negative outcomes, cannot be left aside when projecting a city where justice is to be found. After this criticism, Socrates assumes a less idealized vision of human nature and embarks on the construction of a second city – a city that has, from the start, war and disease (which were absent from the earlier model) among its distinctive characteristics. War and disease occur as a result of having given place to the longing for comfort; however, dreadful and nasty as they are, they are accepted and the political argument resets, pushing the paradigm being designed towards higher philosophical levels. After a long path, the second city, indeed, will become the *Kallipolis.* Pessimism, we will state, makes utopia more complex and brings it closer to reality.

In the second chapter we will focus on Books IV to VII, with the aim of extracting what we consider to be the nucleus of the *Republic´s* pessimism. This pessimism, we claim, is expounded in an explicit way in the theory of the tripartite soul and in the set Sun-Line-Cave. After a brief consideration of Plato´s treatment of the issue of the feasibility of the paradigm, which we ponder not so much as an attempt to persuade the reader about the value of a practical approximation, but as a critique of the paradigm itself, in the sense of a call for attention towards its limitations, we will concentrate on the "personal ideal", that is: on the psychological utopia. The psychological utopia of the *Republic* consists, roughly speaking, on the proposal of rational-based self-domain which is presented, if not as a sufficient condition, at least as a necessary condition to virtue and happiness. However, through the emphasis given to internal conflict (psychic *stasis*), to the description of the limits of domestication of the irrational sources of motivation, especially the appetitive one, and to some internal weaknesses of the rational element, the limits of self-perfection become highlighted. It is in the context of the tripartite soul where hesitation regarding the ideal begins to appear in the *Republic.* That hesitation increases in Book VI when, having stated that the Idea of the Good is the maximum object of knowledge, something that justifies human activity not only from a theoretical but also from a practical point of view, Socrates himself confesses that he does not know what the Good is and cannot give an account of it. This, we will take it, is the apex of the *Republic´*s pessimism, and simultaneously an expression of Socratic rationalism and of the Socratic

paradox “I only know that I know nothing”. Last, but not least, the hesitation increases in Book VII with the Allegory of the Cave which communicates, in its almost infinite hermeneutic openness, several pessimistic insights: the natural laziness of the rational part, the extreme idiotizing power of opinion based on sense perception and, in particular, of public opinion arising from social background over human soul, the distance that naturally separates intelligence from clarity, the need of compulsion on education, the restricted power of the spoken word to free from ignorance, etc. All along this chapter, we will try to show how the pessimistic content of the *Republic* has a psychological origin that spreads to the political domain: the obstacles to the achievement of the psychological ideal flow and affect the political ideal and, to the same extent that one is not achievable, neither is the other.

In the third chapter we will concentrate on the meaning of the word pessimism and on the way it has been applied to Plato´s thought. First, we will expound the debate between Gould and Vlastos who, in the second half of the XXth century, affirm and deny, respectively, Platonic pessimism; then, we will mention Christopher Bobonich´s interpretation which, despite obliquely, applies the epithet to Plato´s thought in the *Republic* in the XXIst century. Thus, we will call attention to the actuality of the issue and make an effort to define what is the pessimism we are talking about. In that context, we will consider the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer, who is traditionally considered to be the father of philosophical pessimism, finding a great proximity between his theories and those presented, explicitly and implicitly, in Plato´s *Republic.* We will distinguish philosophical pessimism from temperamental pessimism, and clarify that what is in question is not a certain state of mind or subjective inclination (towards lamentation, depression or whatsoever), but a specific *theoretical content*, that is, a set of ideas and concepts, and their influence over other ideas and concepts. Philosophical pessimism, we will claim, starts from the premise that this is not the best of all possible worlds, integrates that premise into investigations, takes into consideration its theoretical consequences and, at least in Plato´s case in the *Republic,* continues the argumentation without falling into scepticism or nihilism, but with what we will call philosophical resilience. Progress is possible, albeit incomplete and fallible, *despite* adversity and *within* adversity. Utopian thought might fuel social change. But the utopian thought that deserves to be called philosophical – like that of Plato´s *Republic* - is never a promise of salvation but a work in progress, always raising hesitation, always challenging and reformulating itself, testing its own limits based on the reality of things. Having reached this point, we will conclude that, in view of the constant contrast between utopia and pessimism, it is only correct to state that Plato´s *Republic* is the

first utopian writing in Western literature if it is simultaneously stated that it is the first *critique* of utopian writing in Western literature.

CHAPTER I: Naivete & Ridicule

"And if you don't find words to defend yourself (...)
then to be scorned and flouted will be the penalty you will have to pay"

PLATO, *Republic* V

I

This chapter focuses on Book II of the *Republic,* from the city-soul analogy to the abandonment of the so called First City (368c-374a). We will reconstruct the argument step by step and suggest that the First City is created in the image and likeness of Socrates: it is a state of exceptional people, clever enough to manage social life in peace and harmony and naturally disinterested in social recognition, bodily satisfaction or wealth and, thus, completely immune to *pleonexia* and *akrasia.* For these reasons, we will call the First City "*Socratopolis*", and suggest that it is intentionally introduced as an evasive utopia in order to be objected by means of ridicule. We will observe that this way of criticizing naivete evokes Voltaire's *Candid* and that, being so, it probably arises from a pessimistic soil. We will trace and find the implicit pessimistic premises and conclude that here, as in other moments of the dialogue (such as the encounter with Thrasymachus in Book I, when Socrates is openly called "childish" for believing that shepherds care for sheep out of interest other than their own, etc.[2]) the tension between utopia and pessimism has a particularly important and specific function, which is to fuel the political argument, pushing it towards a properly philosophical dimension. Socrates theorizes about the best possible life for human beings on the assumption that emotional and appetitive impulses are naturally or can be easily moderated, as if *the many* were *the best,* and when Glaucon calls the First City a "City of pigs", he is mocking at Socrates' naivete. In doing this, he is advancing a much less optimistic view of human nature and social condition, namely: that

2 *Rep*. I, 343 a-b.

the greatest source of motivation of *the many* is, precisely, the non-rational part of the soul, spontaneously inclined towards power, sensible pleasure and excess, and that assuming this is a *conditio sine qua non* for any serious political speculation.

Finally, we will join Vegetti's interpretation, according to which the overall project of the *Republic* is to "put on the scene not so much *a* utopia, as the space and the constitutive forms of utopian thinking itself"[3].

II

After leaving behind a series of failed attempts to give an account of justice, of which the encounter with Trasymachus is the culminating point, and pressured by his fellows to show how and why justice is good in itself and preferable to injustice even within a context of total impunity, Socrates proposes, in Book II of the *Republic,* an analogical method of research that will remain until the end: observing how justice and injustice come to be in the larger domain of the city, we will be in a better position to distinguish how they arise in the smaller domain of the individual soul[4]. Thus, the political speculation will always take place in the general context of a psychological one (and vice versa), and the so-called City-Soul analogy is a methodological statement, with a clear heuristic function.

Under its regency, the political argument of the *Republic* begins in Book II with the theoretical contemplation of a nascent city[5]. A first hypothetical social arrangement is settled down there. With Aristotle and the tradition, we shall call it the *First City*[6]. Still in Book II, the First City is called a "City of Pigs" and substituted by a Second one which, on its turn, is considered "bad" and "unhealthy" and also rejected. At his point, a "purgation" process to clean the Second City starts until finally, in Book IV, a third, full and completely new model is accepted by all parties and established as the more desirable and the best possible one. Keep this expression in mind: *the best possible*. So, the political argument of the *Republic* begins in Book II and develops, in a single line, at least up to Book IV. Being so, far from playing "no relevant part"[7], the First City is the origin of everything: it is the "first paradigm", the first step in the way to the *Kallipolis*.

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3 VEGETTI (2010), p. 257.
4 *Rep.* II, 368d-369b.
5 *Rep.* II, 369a.
6 ARISTOTLE, *Politics* IV, 4 1291a.
7 ANNAS J. (1981), pp. 78-79.

However, as long as it is introduced to be immediately discarded, we may be tempted to think that it is not of great relevance to the overall lucubration. In this chapter we will state that this is not the case at all and that, rather, the First City itself and, more precisely, the shift between it and the Second City, is of core importance to the general message of the *Republic.*

From a certain perspective, the *Republic* is a utopian exercise: it is a search of "the best possible", an exercise in theoretically projecting a social, political and psychological state that ensures virtue, happiness and well-being. Models will be successively introduced, criticized and replaced for other models which are better fitted to human condition, history, virtues and vices, possibilities and limitations etc., in a movement that heads to a utopia with philosophical density – a utopia that, even if unfeasible, may be illustrative or even somehow useful regarding what we should do or should not do in the search for a better life. We will suggest that this progressive, peculiar utopian construction occurs by virtue of a counterpoint between the utopian voice itself and a *pessimistic* voice: each time a too confident and optimistic discourse appears, a pessimistic one emerges to oppose and challenge it. This is the way in which utopia grows at the core of the *Republic:* it grows in a movement that has pessimism at its core and, on many occasions, humor as its means. What happens in Book II is a significant example of this cycle. In order to fully expound it, we should go through the passage in detail.

But before doing that, a last word regarding the political content of the *Republic.* From Book II to IV a genealogy takes place: as Reeve puts it, the First City is "overcome but preserved" in the Second, and the Second overcome but preserved in the Third[8]. But the argument does not end here: later, in Books VIII and IX, four *further* types of political arrangements are introduced, this time to portrait the ways in which the better possible system may decline. Thus, we have the whole story of the rise and fall of the city – a story which has *seven* chapters[9]; these seven chapters constitute the complete political argument of the *Republic* – an argument which begins in Book II.

8 REEVE (2006), pp. 170-4.

9 Reeve (2006) states that that "The First city is the *Kallipolis* for money-lovers" and that "the Second City is the *Kallipolis* for honour-lovers". This is inaccurate, because there is no money token in the First City, neither the First nor the Second cities have a social stratification or political organization, etc. etc. Being so, the First and the Second cities can by no means be identified with oligarchy and timocracy respectively. Rather, the models offered in Book II should be regarded as additional paradigms, completely different from those offered in Book VIII, and the political argument of the *Republic* should be conceived as involving seven interdependent models, namely: the First City, the Second City, the *Kallipollis,* timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny.

In order to give an answer to the question regarding the origin of the city, Socrates brings in a group of anthropological axioms and social founding principles[10]. He introduces them one after the other, without any objection from the interlocutors: people come together because each of them has a variety of needs (χρείᾳ) which each one is not able to satisfy autonomously, in isolation; humans are οὐκ αὐτάρκης and this – namely, material necessity and self-interest, rather than free will, curiosity, love or any other nobler reason – is the reason why they approach one another. We group together because we need help. Incompleteness, lack and, therefore, dependence, are essential to human nature and, what is more important in the present context, to human society; lack and necessity are the causes, society, their effect. Even if devoid of all poetry, these appreciations seem lucid and realistic.

So mutual interdependence and, thus, mutual aid or, better, mutual exchange, is the most fundamental social phenomenon. It is therefore necessary to understand it in a better way. The meditation that follows heads at that and focuses on χρείᾳ[11]: there are *some* needs, Socrates says here, such as feeding, housing and clothing, that are simply unavoidable. Later, in Book IV, he will be more precise: food, shelter and clothes are unavoidable needs in the sense that putting them aside would mean to put an end to life itself. From all this Socrates concludes that the most basic human assemblage would be constituted by a farmer, a builder and a weaver exchanging goods and services. This is the "indispensable minimum" (Shorey), the "barest notion" (Jowet) of a *polis;* the "*micropolis*" or "embryonic" *polis* (Mckeen), which Plato says is formed by "four or five men".

Socrates immediately introduces another idea: each of the inhabitants of the *micropolis* will "contribute with his work for the common use of all" instead of just "minding his own affairs"[12] – or simply stealing from others – in modern terms, everyone will generate a production surplus in view of the rest. We don't know whether this is a statement about how people spontaneously behave, or about how they *should* behave within the community - where does this consideration of the welfare of others, this complicity, come from? Nature, or culture? What kind of people is Socrates presupposing here: people as they are, as they should be, as they could be? This will be a central question from now on: a difficult, recurrent question, one to which no explicit and clear answer can be achieved but in which the interpretation of the entire passage depends on.

10 *Rep.* II, 369b-371e.
11 Χρείᾳ means both (i) need, want and (ii) use, advantage.
12 *Rep*. II, 369e-370a.

Socrates goes ahead introducing two completely new axioms. On the one hand, he claims that "our several natures are not alike but different" and that "one man is naturally fitted for one task, and another for another"[13]. For a contemporary reader, who probably tends to think that when properly educated almost everyone can perform any task, this "natural inequality" may sound quite awkward; Glaucon, however, accepts it without protests. With the road thus clear Socrates goes ahead, stating that "one man would do better working not at many tasks, but at one" and concluding that "the result [of this] is that more things are produced, and better and more easily, when one man performs the one task according to his nature"[14]. With the tradition, we will call this the *principle of specialization* (PS)[15]. It is worth noting that PS enters the scene bringing in considerations of efficiency: Socrates is not only worried about survival, but also about maximizing results[16]. Natural inequality and specialization are, in modern terms, the theoretical basis for the division of labor in Socrates' construction. For PS, each of the inhabitants - who Socrates begins here to call "servitors" – would need to be supplied by someone else with tools and raw materials. In view of this, the city will need to develop in size and complexity by the advent of specialized "helpers": carpenters, smiths, herders, craftsmen. With this advent, the Socratic model undergoes a first wave of demographic growth and the micropolis is definitely left behind.

Putting into play for the first time the soul-city analogy, even if explicitly, Socrates states immediately that the community, like the individual, is not self-sufficient[17]. Producers will find out that they do not have at their disposal everything they need, and external commerce will be inevitable. One thing will lead to another. In order to engage in external commerce, a money-token will be introduced. It would also be necessary to increase the production surplus and, in order to do that, the human force would need to be enlarged: more farmers, builders and weavers, and more specialized "helpers" would be needed, together with a completely new kind of servitors: merchants and businessmen. Given the increasing demands, Socrates adds another kind of servitors to the production chain: wage earners, to "help the helpers". With all this, a second wave of population evidently growth takes place, and a quite distinct economic structure

13 *Rep*. II, 370a-b.
14 *Rep*. II, 370b.
15 Reeve sees here a "doctrine", which he calls the *unique aptitude doctrine* (UAD) and a principle that arises from it, which he calls the *prescriptive principle of specialization* (PPS) which, according to his interpretation, will be re-signified in the following books. Cf. REEVE (2006) pp. 172-6.
16 See *Rep*. II, 369d: "Socrates' principle of specialization is introduced as a principle of economic efficiency" (BARNEY, 2001, p. 213). However, as Annas highlights, here Socrates "is not interested in efficiency as such, only efficiency in an association where people´s life are interdependent, and they do not merely "feed side by side" as Aristotle later put it" (1981, p. 74).
17 *Rep*. II, 370e.

emerges. In fact, it should not go unnoticed that up to now the organization of the city has taken place entirely as an *economic* organization. On the whole, Socrates' city is a pretty populous community of specialized craftsmen and traders and their assistants living together, producing and exchanging fundamental goods and services and engaging in commerce intra and extra walls. At this point Socrates states that the city has "reached its full growth and is complete"[18]. A First City is settled, and we are ready to resume the leading question: where can justice be found? Instead of searching for justice and injustice *within* the market and the economic relations, as we would perhaps expect since they are built with such detail and rigor, Socrates inaugurates a completely new line of speculation, claiming that it is the *way of life* of the community that needs to be considered, and proceeds to speculate about that *lifestyle* in the First City in the following terms:

> "Let us consider what will be the manner of life of men thus provided. Will they not make bread and wine and garments and shoes? And they will build themselves houses and carry on their work in summer for the most part unclad and unshod and in winter clothed and shod sufficiently? And for their nourishment they will provide meal from their barley and flour from their wheat, and kneading and cooking these they will serve noble cakes and loaves on some arrangement of reeds or clean leaves, and, reclined on rustic beds strewn with bryony and myrtle, they will feast with their children, drinking of their wine thereto, garlanded and singing hymns to the gods in pleasant fellowship, not begetting offspring beyond their means lest they fall into poverty or war?"[19].

Life in the First City is a work-centered life. Work is carried out with extreme efficiency and everyone has all basic needs met. In this condition, people live in camaraderie and... enjoy nature. There are occasions of leisure, entertainment and celebration[20] which include ornaments and even sex, wine and music, which are nonetheless undertook with moderation (μετρίως) to avoid the bad consequences of excess. This suggests that, from Socrates' perspective, the inhabitants of the First City (whom, by the way, we cannot yet call citizens since, strictly speaking, there is no form of political organization) are quite long sighted in their self-interest. The question appears once again: what kind of people is Socrates presupposing? How have they learned to be moderate: do they have a history of their own? Have they been sagacious enough to learn by observing other cultures – cultures with which

18 *Rep*. II, 371e.
19 *Rep.* II, 372a-c.
20 The inhabitants of the First City εὐωχήσονται, 372b6.

they trade, for example? Have they, perhaps, spontaneously deduced that overpopulation leads to a breakdown of the social balance? Instead of raising any of these questions, however, Glaucon reacts ὑπολαβών – that is, suddenly interrupting[21] – with a startling consideration: "No relishes apparently," he quickly says, "for the men you describe as feasting"[22].

> "True" (...) "I forgot that they will also have relishes – salt, of course, and olives and cheese and onions and greens, the sort of things they boil in the country, they will boil up together. But for dessert we will serve them figs and chickpeas and beans, and they will toast myrtle-berries and acorns before the fire, washing them down with moderate potations and so, living in peace and health, they will probably die in old age and hand on a like life to their offspring"[23].

Before such a bucolic portrait, Glaucon reacts for a second time, now with deeper urgency and in evident provocation: "If you were founding a city of pigs, Socrates, what other fodder than this would you provide?"[24]. This is a memorable moment – a humorous moment, yes, but also a moment of great tension. Glaucon is openly ridiculing Socrates. From his perspective, the way of life in Socrates' City is comparable to that of animals and, what is more, of very dirty animals: he is not talking about swans or bees, but of pigs. A City of pigs, he says; a congregation of subhuman creatures, of beasts, completely devoid of any sophistication. Unable to make a deaf ear to such a comparison, Socrates allows Glaucon to express his demands. Glaucon longs for "what is customary" (νομίζεται) – not to sleep in leaves but in beds, not to feast with berries but with delicatessen, and so on. His requirements are not a big deal, and the average reader easily agrees with him. But Socrates doesn't and states, critically, that if those kinds of things are taken in consideration, then what is at issue is not just the origin of a city but of a *luxurious* city (τρυφῶσανν πόλιν)[25]. Up to here, Socrates has been more or less in a *descriptive* mood; now, his attitude becomes *evaluative:* he says that the First City is the true *polis* (ἀληθινὴ πόλις), the healthy one (ὑγιής τις), while Glaucon's is a fevered (φλεγμαίνουσαν) city[26]. What is "customary" for one is, thus, diseased for the other. In such a tense circumstance, and despite being evidently uncomfortable with Glaucon's requirements, Socrates nevertheless accepts them all and gives up the First City without any further effort to defend it. But why? Why, after having made such a great effort to design his own model, both

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21 ὑπολαβών (from ὑπολαμβάνω) – bear up, resist; *take up, seize* or *come suddenly upon*; *retort* ; *take up, interrupt*; *suspect, disbelieve.*
22 *Rep.* II, 372c.
23 *Rep.* II, 372b-c.
24 *Rep.* II, 372d.
25 *Rep.* II, 372e.
26 *Rep.* II, 372e.

economically and culturally, does Socrates abandon it without the minimal vindication and, what is more, in favor of something he evidently disapproves of? Whatever the answer to this question is (and we will come back to it immediately), the fact is that he accepts the shift and goes ahead, expanding Glaucon's list of extras: not only tables and beds, but furniture in general shall be included in the new city and myrrh, incense, prostitutes (ἑταῖραι), cakes, as well as painting and embroidery, gold and ivory and professional manufacturers of all sorts of articles. Also "imitators" of all kinds should be welcomed: painters, poets, rhapsodists, actors, dancers... and managers to deal with the whole business, as well as tutors, nurses, barbers and cooks, chefs, herds of every kind, etc. With the advent of such a multitude, the city inevitably undergoes a third, this time massive as never before, wave of demographic growth. And the explosion goes beyond. Socrates claims that two last kinds of servitors, who were completely absent in the First City, will be necessary in the inflamed one: doctors, on the one hand, to handle the health problems that would come along with the luxurious lifestyle; on the other hand, and in order to account for the extra requirements, more land would be necessary and territorial expansion would arise as a task to be performed, in view of what a whole army of professional soldiers will be necessary. Excess, in other words, will bring *disease* and *war*.

With the advent of doctors and soldiers we already have a basic design of a whole new city: the Second City. The Second city is Glaucon's city, *as presented by Socrates*; it is the First City, inflamed and diseased. Completeness and health are left behind and we now have an overcrowded *polis* with a high demand of goods and services that transcend basic needs. The market is more vibrant, but with the inclusion of "the superfluous", health is lost; with the inclusion of an army, peace is lost altogether. These are, for Socrates, the symptoms of the Second City's illness; being so, he states that from now on the task will be to "cure the fever". The education of the professional soldiers, who Socrates immediately begins to call "guardians" (φύλακες) and which takes place in sequence, is the first step of a purge that will occupy the following books and yield to a Third City in Book IV: the *Kallipolis.* The *Kallipolis* is the Second City after the consequences of luxury have been somehow controlled. In its context, the question about justice and injustice will once again be resumed and, finally, given an answer.

This is a basic reconstruction of the genealogy of the city as it takes place in *Republic* II. In a way, it would have been enough to consider directly the Second City, the city "as it is" (since the Second City is the "customary" city, as Glaucon puts it). In fact, all the principles introduced by Socrates to fund the First City could perfectly have been introduced to found the Second City, since they are all received without questioning and constitute the basis of the organization of *both* models. What role does the First City play, then? There is an

interpretation that suggests that it does not play *any* relevant role. Annas, for example, states that "Plato has not given the First City a clear place in the *Republic*'s moral argument", since it "adds nothing" except a plausible context to introduce the Principle of Specialization[27]. But this sounds improper. First of all, because there are many other things besides PS that are introduced here and remain active and crucial throughout the whole dialogue: the principle of natural inequality, for example, is the background of the polemical Myth of the Metals in Book III; the idea that human nature is marked by needs and desires, among which some are inescapable as long as they are necessary to maintain the most basic vital functions, is one of the pillars on which the theory of the tripartite soul is built from Book IV on, etc. Secondly, because, as we shall see in a moment, all principles but one – the one about basic human needs – pass unquestioned; being so, the First City could well be considered also a "plausible context" to introduce *this* specific issue, rather than just or specially PS. Last, but not least, Socrates spends a long time on the design of the First City and it is odd to believe that Plato makes him behave like that just to introduce one single principle that could have been presented in a much simpler way. Against Annas, we believe there are many and more important motives for Socrates' behavior, motives that transcend in much the PS and from which the reader can extract several and not at all irrelevant conclusions.

One of the main functions of the First City is to be an example of what a utopia that deserves to be called philosophical should *not* be. The question to be asked here is less "Why is the First City introduced?" than "Why is the First City introduced *and then left behind*?". So let's focus now on the reason why the First City is left behind. Glaucon has nothing to object to ideas like natural inequality, lack of autarchy, etc.; his reaction is elicited *only when the way of life – that is: the habits, ethics and culture – of people in the First City enters the scene*.

What happens exactly when the time comes to describe the *way of life* within the First City? To begin with, Socrates changes his mood strikingly. The portrait he gives is to a large extent detached from the previous one: while the first part of the construction, devoted to the economic structure, rests on philosophical (even if not accounted for) assumptions logically linked, the second part, devoted to the culture, develops through a different kind of discourse. It is made of wish-thoughts, rather than of axioms and principles. It is full of evaluative content, as we said above; fantasy and imagination look like its sources more than empirical observation or theoretical speculation: people making bread, feeding from berries and corn before the fire,

27 ANNAS J. (1981), pp. 78-79. WATERFIELD R. follows this interpretation (WATERFIELD, transl. *and introduction to Plato's Republic,* Oxford, 1993, p. xxii).

reclining in dry leaves beds… singing hymns to the gods. There is here, we may say, a leap from the philosophical to the poetical and, more precisely, to the idyllic or the romantic. And the romantic trait is not only due to the bucolic atmosphere, but of the whole frame: the First City is a stateless society, based on voluntary and spontaneous association, there is neither government nor institutions for this people, no rule but the good consciousness of each one, no excluding social classes, no formal education. Had Glaucon not interrupted, the *Republic* would perhaps have been a speculation about anarchy. Work, yes, but also fraternity, peace, celebration, spirituality, health and longevity are the virtues of the Socratic paradise.

However, this may not be what it seems. There is an interpretative line according to which the First City is *not* genuinely praised by Socrates, every sign of appreciation being insincere. Bosanquet, for example, says that Socrates' praise of the First City "has rather the appearance of a satire on contemporary cynicism"[28]. This is to suggest that Socrates somehow *wants* his proposal to be rejected, criticized – and even – we may ask – ridiculed?. Strauss and Bloom, to whom we will come back later, join this view and take it to its limits: Socrates is neither honest here nor when he proposes that philosophers should rule, that women should be trained as well as men, etc. etc.; on the whole, they say, he is insincere at every step, proposing ideas in which he does not really believe just in order to elicit debate and to put his interlocutors to think about *other* alternatives. Regarding what happens in Book II, Barney also inclines in this direction. She states that Socrates' proposal is ambiguous and hard to classify: on the one hand, it looks like an exercise in political philosophy, similar to that undertook by Aristotle in *Politics* I; on the other, however, it looks like a depiction of a Golden Age - but a weird Golden Age. The Socratic paradise is not one of "spontaneous abundance", as "traditional" Golden Ages are, but of struggle and logistics: there is a market and a money-token in paradise!, people are essentially workers, helpers, servitors... and not because they *want* to, but because they *need* it *to survive*. What kind of Golden Age is this? Barney founds the mixture "disorientating". She puts on the table the idea that the paradigm introduced by Socrates looks less like a Golden Age than "a very different kind of story (…) which told of early hardships and a struggle towards civilization". Is Socrates thinking about the past or about the future? She also calls attention to the fact that Socrates makes a greater emphasis on free food than in social virtues, a gesture which is characteristic of... comical poets. She concludes that Socrates' First City should be read as a "subversion of the *cliché*" or as a "parodic pseudo- or anti-idyll" normative[29]. However, in Hesiod's *Works and Days* we read:

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28 BOSANQUET, *A companion to Plato's* Republic, London, 1895, p. 84. Quoted in: Mckeen (2004), p. 74.
29 BARNEY (2001) p. 216.

> "First of all the deathless gods who dwell on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men who lived in the time of Cronos when he was reigning in heaven. And they lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils. When they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep, and they had all good things; *for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint.* They dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, *rich in flocks* and loved by the blessed gods"[30].

The mention of alimentary habits and relation with food is not, then, an exclusive characteristic of comic poetry and it is not enough to conclude that Socrates is performing a satirical gesture. In any case, the important thing to highlight here is that, whether Socrates praises it sincerely or not, there is an idyll, a kind-of-paradise, a utopia – as we shall call it from now on – at stake in the First City, and that it is when this utopia completely emerges that Glaucon reacts, mocking at it, and the argument dramatically changes its course until the First City is abandoned.

But why is this utopia ridiculed and then abandoned? Some say that it is abandoned because it is condemned to destruction from within: as long as the inhabitants of the Socratic city are human, they must have *pleonetic* impulses which, in view of the lack of mechanisms of rational repression, will inevitably come forth, bring chaos and put an end to the harmonious life. The First City is condemned to destruction by the irresistible power of appetitive desire[31]. Reeve says that the First City "is stable only in a fantasy world in which people never pursue *pleonetic* satisfaction, never lose control of them-selves or succumb to *akrasia*"[32]. But he immediately discards this alternative: Socrates cannot be presupposing such kind of people; if he is doing so, he is presupposing people that are "less than human" or "not fully human in the relevant sense" – "primitive people", as Cooper puts it, who "will experience no, or no effective, positive desire of any sort that might tempt them to cheat and freeload"[33] – and this could hardly

30 HESIOD, *Works and Days,* 110-120.
31 Reeve says: "the First *polis* is not a real possibility because it includes nothing to counteract the destabilizing effects of unnecessary appetites and the *pleonexia* to which they give rise" (Reeve, 1988, p. 171); Wallach, that "nothing in the healthy city (…) would prevent the developments that Socrates subsequently describes (…) [and] there is nothing to stop this city from becoming inflamed, greedy, imperialistic and eventually stumbling into war" (WALLACH J., *The Platonic political art: A study of critical reason and democracy,* University Park, 2001. Quoted in: Mckeen (2004), p. 76); Barney, that "appetite will spontaneously overreach" (BARNEY, *Op. cit*., p. 219).
32 REEVE, Op. Cit., p. 178.
33 COOPER (2000) p. 14.

be the case. The inhabitants of the First City should be "human in the normal sense", that is: humans with a tripartite soul, who *will inevitably* be motivated by an open-ended desire for pleasurable gratification. Being so, the First city *will necessarily* collapse.

But what if Socrates is presupposing something different? What if he is thinking about people who are "human in the normal sense" and, in view of that, experience *pleonetic* impulses, *but* who have the rare quality of never losing control of them-selves or succumbing to *akrasia*? After all, we know this is possible: t[h]e whole ethics and the whole psychology developed from book IV on are based on this idea, that is, on the idea that "normal" human nature is marked by the existence of an open-ended desire for pleasurable gratification that can, however, be tamed and moderated, thus avoiding vice and reaching virtue. The inhabitants of the First City drink μετρίως and, fundamentally, control sexual desire in order to avoid its negative social consequences (overpopulation, poverty and war). This is not a minor issue. Even if, as we said, it is not possible to know exactly how the people in the First City have learned to behave this way, the fact is that they *do* behave this way. Being so, instead of being "less than human" they rather seem to be, at least on this particular issue, exceptional, "more than human" – in the sense that they can easily and efficiently manage *pleonetic* impulses when they appear. One question to be asked here is: why is Socrates presupposing such exceptional natures? One possible answer could be: because he is considering his own self as reference. In this sense, Diogenes Laertius says:

> "[Socrates] was a man of great independence and dignity of character (…) Alcibiades once offered him a large site on which to build a house; but he replied, "Suppose, then, I wanted shoes and you offered me a whole hide to make a pair with, would it not be ridiculous to take it?" Often when he looked at the multitude of wares exposed for sale, he would say to himself, "How many things I can do without!" And he would continually recite the lines: *The purple robe and silver's shine/ More fits an actor's need than mine*"[34].

And Bloom claims:

> "Socrates is (…) an erotic man, but <u>his</u> *eros* does not lead him (…) to injure others or take what belongs to them. In order to satisfy <u>his</u> *eros,* he does not need to compete with other men to their detriment. *He* has no wealth and no honor; in fact he is despised and believed to be unjust. Yet, <u>he</u> is happy (…) He *does not live without the ordinary pleasures*

34 DIOGENES LAERTIUS (1972) § 24-25.

> *because he is an ascetic, but because the intensity of the joy in philosophy makes him indifferent to them*"[35].

The picture given by Diogenes is well known. Socrates is not seduced by material possessions, but quite indifferent to them. What is more: he is full of sexual desire, but he is able to control it – we have seen him, in the *Symposyum,* restraining the love Alcibiades provokes on him. Apart from some questionable elements in Bloom's portrait (doesn't Socrates really "compete with other men to their detriment"? Is he "happy"?, etc.) the description is useful to show that Socrates himself is "human in the relevant sense" without necessarily being uncontrollably inclined to pleasure and sensible gratification. The inhabitants of the First city may not be "normal" human beings, subjected to an appetitive-driven default state *who will be inevitably corrupted by pleonexia*, but atypical characters, who will instead *never* be corrupted through *pleonexia.* Socrates is not talking about "the many", but about "the few". When sketching social life in the *Kallipolis*, he expresses in the following terms:

> "Turn your eyes upon our new city [...] and you will find […] the mob of motley appetites and pleasures and pains [...] chiefly in children and women and slaves and in the base rabble (ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς τε καὶ φαύλοις) of those who are freemen in name […] Simple and moderate (ἁπλᾶς τε καὶ μετρίας) appetites (…) you will find in few (ἐν ὀλίγοις) and those the best born (βέλτιστα μὲν φῦσιν) […] And do you not find this too in your city and a domination there of the desires in the multitude (ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς) and the rabble (φαύλοις) by the desires and the wisdom that dwell in the minority of the better (ἐν τοῖς ἐλάττοσί τε καὶ ἐπιεικεστέροις)?"[36].

In Socrates' First City, not only *some* of the inhabitants are "the best" – but *all* of them! In Book VIII, Socrates states that "except in the case of some *rarely gifted nature* (ὑπερβεβλημένην φύσιν) no one could ever become a good man unless from childhood his play and all his pursuits were concerned with fair and good things"[37]; and he says before that the philosophical nature is like a plant "which, having the proper nurture, must necessarily grow and mature into all virtue"[38]. In the absence of corrupting influences – just like in the First City

35 BLOOM, A. (1968), p. 347. And JONAS: "While it is true that Glaucon would not be satisfied in the First City, it does not necessarily follow that *all* individuals would not be satisfied. Socrates, for instance, does not require such luxuries", JONAS, *Op. cit*, 349.
36 *Rep.* IV, 431b-c.
37 *Rep*. VIII, 558b.
38 *Rep*. VIII, 558b.

– the "best natures" would flourish naturally, as a consequence of being surrounded by direct examples of true virtue and with no need of formal education or external compulsion: passing shared habits privately to children (who would also, *ex hypothesis*, be exceptional!) from generation to generation will be enough.

What is more: in Book VI, when describing once again the nature (φύσις) of "the few" by contrasting it with "the many", Socrates suggests that the soul is like a river and "when in a man the desires incline strongly to any one thing, they are weakened for other things (...) as if the stream had been diverted into another channel"[39]. The people Socrates is presupposing in the First City in Book II may simply *not be interested* in wealth and in maximizing sensible pleasures. He may be presupposing a person who has *naturally* a weak attraction towards comfort and pleasure and who becomes, let's say, "easily satisfied" regarding bodily pleasures, her concern being to meet the fundamental needs (food, shelter, clothing) *just in order to be free from them and to devote immediately to other activities*. If we are allowed to speculate about what would have caused the First City's ruin if Socrates' design had not be interrupted, we should be allowed to speculate about what would have caused its success: if Socrates have had the opportunity to continue his description, and if the inhabitants of the First City are really of "the best by nature", then he would probably have pictured their complete lifestyle just like his own: indifferent to luxuries, they would fulfill their duties for the community and then go around just experiencing the pleasures of reason and philosophical inquire. In fact, the "best natures" are *philosophical* natures[40]. The First City could be something like a "Socratopolis", that is, a city pictured by Socrates *in his own image and likeness*.

But Glaucon is not Socrates. He is not an exceptional, but an average human being and its very natural for him to ask: if the inhabitants of the First City have food for granted, why don't they eat in dishes? He longs for the elementary comfort of ordinary societies – he longs for "what is customary" – and suggests to go a step ahead the "indispensable minimum" in order (or so it seems) *to reach that basic standard*. In doing this, he obliquely reacts against the idea that a good life is based solely on the satisfaction of fundamental needs. "The First City is intended to be one in which necessary appetites are optimally satisfied throughout life"[41], *but* human needs and wants, Glaucon implicitly claims, go far beyond necessity. Socrates is aware of this, when he says that:

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39 *Rep.* IV, 485d.
40 *Rep.* IV, 486a *et seq.*
41 REEVE, *Op. Cit.*, p. 177.

> "for some (τισιν) that healthy state is no longer sufficient (οὐκ ἐξαρκέσει) (…) [because] the requirements we first mentioned (...) will no longer be confined to necessities (οὐκέτι τἀναγκαῖα θετέον)"[42].

These "some" – Socrates will end up accepting – are not "the few", but "the many". But it is worth noting that Glaucon himself is just asking for beds, tables and some minimally refined food: he demands neither actors and perfumes, nor any of the extra items that Socrates puts into his mouth; Glaucon condescendingly agrees to it all, yes, *but it is actually Socrates* who passes from pretty modest requirements to people "abandoning themselves to the unlimited acquisition of wealth"[43]. The rhetorical nuances of Socrates' listing display clearly that he is worried about the inclusion of "extras": at the beginning, he seems amused and his discourse is soaked with caricatural gestures, typical devices of Aristophanic humor such as the sudden inclusion of *etairas* – "prostitutes" – among furniture and cakes[44]; however, at the end he turns to a serious mood, invoking war and disease. Why is Socrates "uneasy" regarding the addition of unnecessary items and extends Glaucon's demands in this way? The answer to this question can be found in the description of the appetitive part of the soul that is given from Book IV on. There, it is said that "the appetitive part is the mass of the soul in each of us and the most insatiable (ἀπληστότατον) by nature"[45] ; that it is a non-rational (ἀλόγιστος) and complex entity and that, given the great variety of random desires (*epithumía*) contained in it, it is generically named the "appetitive", the *epithumetikós*. Among the enormous diversity within appetite, later in the *Republic* Socrates will distinguish three paradigmatic varieties: first, *necessary* desires, which are related to basic physiological requests and whose elimination results in elimination of life itself[46], such as hunger, thirst and sexual impetus; second, *unnecessary* desires[47], which can be conceived as *purely hedonistic* desires, as long as they are independent from any biological need. Thus, it can be said that while in view of necessary desires we share in our nature with animals, in view of unnecessary desires, we distinguish from them. This distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires is useful to understand what is going on in Book II: a city in which everything is organized so that *only* or *little more than* the fundamental,

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42 *Rep.* II, 373a. Cf. also: "The healthy state is no longer sufficient (οὐκέτι ἱκανή) " (373b); there "we had no need (ἔδει... οὐδέν) of them, but in this city there will be this further need (προσδεήσει)" (373c) [[[ἔδει, from δέω: 2. b. *Be in want* or *need, require, stand in need of, want*, *have need of necessaries;* LSJ]]], but now there are "multitude of things that are not necessary/exceed the requirements of necessity (ἃ οὐκέτι τοῦ ἀναγκαίου ἕνεκά ἐστιν)" (372b).

43 *Rep.* II, 373d-e.

44 As Shorey highlights, the sudden inclusion of an incongruous item in a list is a typical device of Aristophanic humor. Cf. *Symposium* 176e, Aristoph. *Ach*., 1090-1092.

45 *Rep.* IV, 442a. See also 506b, 588c.

46 *Rep.* X, 558d.

47 *Rep.* X, 571b and X 558d respectively.

necessary demands for life are fulfilled, resembles, from Glaucon's perspective a herd of animals – a "City of Pigs" –, not a human community.

But Socrates is seeing beyond. In Book IX, he will distinguish a third kind of appetitive desire. Appetite, he says there, is like a manifold and many-headed beast, with tame and wild jaws, which *tend to transform into one another with enormous facility*[48]. That the heads of the beast "can change and cause to spring forth from itself all such growths*"* suggests that unnecessary appetites can very easily change and run out of control, giving way to the "monstrous winged drone" of vice, a "tyrant Eros" that deprives of all "shame and reason"[49]. The third and last kind of appetitive impulses are described by Socrates as *arising from* unnecessary desires, becoming "terrible, fierce and lawless (…) desires", obscene specimens considered right away παράνομοι, such as wanting to have sex with one's mother, to kill one's father or to eat human flesh[50]. The whole picture communicates the idea of appetite's *brutish* and *aggressive* nature. Necessary desires lead to life, superfluous pleasures lead to *paranomoi* impulses and behavior, that is: to vice and, from there, to conflict and destruction. When Socrates jumps from Glaucon's modest requirements to unlimited acquisition of wealth and its consequences (war, disease, need of external control, etc.), he probably has in mind this portrait of the appetitive part of the soul. This, on the whole, seems to be the reason behind Socrates uneasiness and progressively dramatic attitude regarding the inclusion of unnecessary pleasures in the initial draft of the paradigmatic community: he himself is prepared to allow the inclusion of some relishes (ὄψον), which, in the context of the theory of the tripartite soul, are counted among necessary appetites[51]; however, this is all he can condescend regarding pleasure. And he has good grounds to take this position, since he knows well that, at least in the case of "the

48 *Rep*. IX, 588c-d.
49 *Rep.* X 573d - 571c.
50 *Rep.* X 571c et seq. Cf. Parry, 2007, translates "μιαιφονεῖν τε ὁτιοῦν, βρώματός τε ἀπέχεσθαι μηδενός" (*Rep.,* IX 571b-d) as "a contamination of the blood and eating forbidden food" and quotes Adam (1962, vol II, pp. 319-20), who, according to him, suggests that Socrates is referring to parricide and cannibalism.
51 "In order not to argue in the dark, shall we first define our distinction between necessary and unnecessary appetites (…) Desires that we cannot divert or suppress may be properly called necessary, and likewise those whose satisfaction is beneficial to us (…) for our nature compels us to seek their satisfaction (…) we shall rightly use the word *necessary* of them (...) And (…) the desires from which a man could free himself by discipline from youth up, and whose presence in the soul does no good and in some cases harm [we] should (...) fairly call all such *unnecessary* (…) Let us select an example of either kind, so that we may apprehend the type (...) The desire of eating to keep in health (...) and the appetite for mere bread and relishes [ὄψον, just like 372c] [are] *necessary* (…) The appetite for bread is *necessary* in both respects: in that it is beneficial and in that if it fails we die, and the desire for relishes [ὄψον, again], so far as it conduces to fitness (…) And [we] should not rightly pronounce *unnecessary* the appetite that exceeds these and seeks other varieties of food, and that by correction and training from youth up can be got rid of in most cases and is harmful to the body and a hindrance to the soul's attainment of intelligence and sobriety (…) And [we] may call the one group the spendthrift (ἀναλωτικάς) desires, and the other the profitable (χρηματιστικὰς), because they help production (...) And we shall say the same of sexual and other appetites" (558d- 559c).

many", freeing desire ends in *stasis* due to appetite's inborn violence, lack of rationality, tendency towards excess, natural instability, insatiability, etc.

Be the reason why Socrates does not bring unnecessary appetites into his picture of the First City that he is supposing less-than-human people who will never experience them, be it that he is supposing more-than-human people, that is: "exceptional" and "best" natures (life himself), who are "naturally" not interested in maximizing pleasures and would easily manage them if they appear, the fact is that *he wants to do without unnecessary pleasures* and, mainly: that *he is not allowed to do so*.

With Annas, we shall think that Plato is aware that "it is no good basing a political theory on the *optimistic assumption* that people will limit their demands to what they have natural and necessary needs for"; as a result, "Socrates' acquiescence to Glaucon's demand is a recognition that people will always go on to demand unnecessary gratifications, and the ideally just state is developed from a realistic theory of human nature rather than an impossible ideal" [52]. As M. Nussbaum puts it: "the (…) visions of the Golden Age depend on a suspension of the realities of the natural world; the First City depends on a similar suspension of the realities of human nature"[53]. Socrates' First paradigm is, then, evasive from the point of view of *hoi polloi,* and Brucker's memorable criticism that "the *Republic* is a chimerical, naive piece of speculation – a mere work of literary fiction, which should not be taken seriously because it is not the product of rational exercise but an expression of wish-thoughts"[54], which is unfair when applied to the dialogue as a whole, is nonetheless pertinent in the context of the cultural depiction of the First City in Book II: Socrates, who will later develop a finer sensitivity in this regard[55], is trying here to cross the line to wish-thoughts, but *he is not allowed to do so*. He is

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52 ANNAS (1981), p. 77; and Cooper: in expanding the First city to the Second Socrates "is recognizing the presence in human beings, and the power, of desires for pleasures of all sorts (…) along with the desire for one´s own good" (Cooper, 2000, p 14). Regarding the interpretation of the First city as a utopia based on an ideal human nature: Annas finds it vulnerable due to (i) the fact that "people in the First city are motivated in their association *entirely* by self-interest, and this isn´t the most glorious way of presenting *ideal* human nature" and (ii) because justice *and injustice* could be found in the First city, and - how would a Golden Age include injustice? (p. 78). We may answer to (i) insisting that the "Golden Age" portrait is *limited to the cultural aspect of the First city* (and not indistinctly to the whole construction, that is: to the economic arrangement also) and to (ii) suggesting that, if Socrates have had the opportunity to develop his picture, injustice would probably have come "from the outside", that is: as a consequence of the relations maintained between the First (just) city through external commerce with other societies that may not be just.

53 Quoted in: BARNEY, *Idem*. p. 217.

54 BRUCKER, (1792), pp. 249-250.

55 Glaucon will claim in Book V: "And if you don't find words to defend yourself [...] then to be scorned and flouted will [...] be the penalty you will have to pay" (474a). Mockery and ridicule are the costs of evasive utopia. Socrates will recognize that: "One (...) shrinks from touching on the matter lest the theory be regarded as nothing but a 'wish-thought´ (μὴ εὐχὴ δοκῇ εἶναι ὁ λόγος) (450d); and in Book VI: "in that case we could be justly ridiculed as uttering things as futile as [wish-thoughts] are (ἡμεῖς δικαίως καταγελώμεθα, ὡς ἄλλως εὐχαῖς ὅμοια λέγοντες " (VI 499c). From Book II on, then, we will be challenged to consider the issue of the practicability of the paradigm.

trying to make his interlocutors agree on a naive picture of human nature. But he is ridiculed by Glaucon and, finally, accepts the criticism.

III

This is not the first time this maneuver takes place in the *Republic* – and will not be the last. In Book I we found a similar gesture. There, in dialogue with Cephalus and then with his son, Polemarchus, Socrates tries to visualize which is the best possible way of life for human beings and which is the path that leads to it. Around them, a group of young men are listening to the conversation; all of them are attentive, in silence... all, but one: Thrasymachus. Progressively impatient with what he is listening at, Thrasymachus finally turns a deaf ear to his fellows, who try to restrain him from speaking, and breaks into the conversation, saying: "What folly, Socrates, has taken possession of you? And why do you submit to one another?"[56]. Socrates and Polemarchus had advanced ideas such as that committing injustice is preferable to suffer it, that the just obtains a greater advantage than the unjust, that under no circumstance it is fair to cause harm to anyone, and so on. Thrasymachus believes these ideas are nonsense/balderdash and that those who hold them are acting like merry/benevolent fools/idiots. Later we find out that, for Thrasymachus, justice and injustice are exactly the opposite of what is being proclaimed: committing injustice is preferable to suffer it, the just obtains a greater advantage than the unjust, and so on. Socrates, on his turn, is perplex with such an inversion of values and manages to engage Thrasymachus' in dialogue and, finally, to reduce his positions to absurd. During the process, Thrasymachus laughs sardonically (ἀνεκάγχασέ… σαρδάνιον[57]), and reacts fiercely making fun of Socrates. In a certain moment, for example, he says: "Tell me, Socrates, have you got a nurse?"; Socrates asks why he is asking such a question, and Thrasymachus answers: "Because (…) she let us her little 'snotty' run about drivelling and does not wipe your face clean, though you need it badly" [58].

The issue is political power here, and the context is metaphorical: to imagine that shepherds take care of their herds with a different purpose than their own benefit is childish and Naive. That is to say that Socrates himself is childish and Naive. Thrasymachus is mocking at him. It is as if he was saying: "Socrates: you speak of a human nature that does not exist.

Cf: 415c-d; 423d-424a; 425d-e; 450d; 452e-453c; 456c; 457a-e; 458a-b; 466d; 471c-e; 472b-473b; 485a; 499c-500e; 502a-c; 520e-521a; 540d; 592a.

56 *Rep*. I, 336b-c: Καὶ τί εὐηθίζεσθε πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὑπο κατακλινόμενοι ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς;

57 *Rep*. I, 337a. Cf. *Od. XX 301,* where Odisseus smiles *sardanion* when dodging a stroke from Ctesipus.

58 *Rep*. I, 343 a.

Nobody prefers to suffer than to commit injustice. Facts show exactly the contrary of what you are saying: it is the just who obtains a greater advantage. You are naive and evasive! Human beings are egoistic and have no mercy. You are childish and Naive. And you are ridiculous"[59].

This is the first time in the dialogue Socrates is mocked and ridiculed and becomes *geloios*. But it is not the last. As we have seen, Glaucon puts him in a similar position once again as soon as in Book II, and will do this again in other moments in the rest of the books. In each occasion, the mockery will be different. Here, for example, it is different because Thrasymachus and Glaucon are themselves very different. Thrasymachus is arrogant, irreverent, irate and, above all, immoral (at least from a Socratic point of view). He is the antithesis of the good disciple. Glaucon, on his turn, is the prototypical Socratic disciple: all his interventions show that he has a great respect for the master, and when he allows himself, even if discreetly, to disagree, he does so in a respectful way. In the mockery of one there is violence and sarcasm, in that of the other, moderation and, somehow, good manners. Using the vocabulary introduced to define psychological typologies in books IV to IX, we may say that Thrasymachus has a tyrannical soul: he is possessed by lust for pleasure and power and wealth to such an extent that the ideas and values he defends are openly *paranomoi*. Glaucon is much more virtuous (again, at least from a Socratic point of view). Initially it may seem that he has an oligarchic or even a democratic soul, since he seems to be longing for bodily pleasures. If this is the case, he already has a moral superiority in comparison to Thrasymachus. However, the distance between the two characters is deeper. "Glaucon speaks here on behalf of appetite; yet, his tone is not one of greedy complaint but indignation, and his demand is that the citizens have proper couches and tables, i.e., the apparatus of a civilized Athenian symposium. This is the voice less of appetite than of *thumos,* spirit"[60]. In other words, his demands regard dignity; more specifically, the dignity implicit in those things that distinguish human life from the life of beasts. If this is so, he has a tymocratic soul. As a matter of fact, he is usually considered to be the sort of "promising *thumos*-driven young man who would be receiving training as an Auxiliary in the *Kallipolis"*[61]. Be it that Glaucon has a tymocratic, an oligarchic or a democratic soul, the fact is that he is psychologically/ethically superior to Thrasymachus, who evidently has a tyrannic soul, that is: the worst possible kind of soul/psychic variation. Glaucon and

59 The image is resumed in 345b, where Thrasymachus says, with greater violence: "What more can I do for you? Would you have me put the proof bodily into your soul?". According to Adam, he is referring to the feeding of infants by nannies.
60 BARNEY, *Op. cit*, p. 214, and also: BROWN, E., "Plato's Ethics and Politics in *The Republic*", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/plato-ethics-politics/>
61 Idem.

Glaucon's mockery have, then, a status superior to Thrasymachus and Thrasymachus' mockery; he makes fun of Socrates, but his joke is somehow more serious, more worthy of consideration. However, beyond this difference, there is something that remains the same in both interventions: Socrates is ridiculed due to his naivety.

In Book II, the way of life in Socratopolis is mocked at because it suggests that "the many" are "exceptional" and because it is an attempt to do without unnecessary pleasures. These two ideas squeak loudly when compared with the reality of the facts. Socrates thinks or, better, *wishes,* that human beings were sagacious enough to spontaneously realize that by welcoming the superfluous they surrender to eternal lack and dissatisfaction, embracing conflict, war and disease[62], pain and suffering both in their souls and their cities and, thus, ultimately calling for their own destruction. He also wishes that moderation was an ordinary virtue among men: he wishes they were temperate and simple, naturally disinterested in material goods and bodily pleasures. Through Glaucon's burlesque "City of Pigs", all this is ridiculed. A community without *opson* is, at least for an average observer like Glaucon, an *undesirable* community. Being so, it does not meet the most basic requirements of utopia – and we shall remember that one of the great tasks of the conversation is, as it is explicitly said later, to build a "paradigm in the sky", to "paint" or design theoretically the better possible constitution or, in few words (and we will turn to this in more detail later), to engage in a utopian construction. The attempt to present such a community like the First City as desirable – and "healthy", "true", etc. – *be it serious, be it not*, does not fit the function of true social and political theorization. As Shorey puts it, in presenting the First City as a City of Pigs "Plato expresses with humorous exaggeration his own recognition of the inadequacy for ethical and social philosophy of [Socrates'] idyllic proposal"[63]. The First City is not useful for the argument, and must therefore be discarded; the way to get rid of it is through mockery: Glaucon's "City of pigs" is a parody of Socratopolis, and the corollary is that the naivety of Socrates is eradicated through ridicule.

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62 Another premise on which Socrates is based and which is, if not naïve, at least questionable from any point of view, is that disease and war are caused in the city by the situation of abundance and *pleonexia*, that is, by the fact that it goes beyond the satisfactions of basic needs. It seems Socrates wants to suggest that if there were no luxuries, there would be no war and disease. Socrates' argument can work in the following terms: appetite and *pleonexia can* lead to war and disease. But everything indicates that Socrates wants to go further, and maintain that war and disease *only* appear *if* there are unnecessary appetites and luxury. This is completely false. Many non-pleonetic people get sick. War is not just about expanding territory. Historians give an account of this and the history of mankind itself accounts for it; lack, for example, is another cause of war and in extreme climates, this is in fact a common thing: in order not to starve, many communities are led to territorial invasion and war. It could well be said that luxury is a sufficient condition for war and disease, but never that it is a necessary condition. Thus, the need to have an army in the city does not arise from *pleonexia*.

63 SHOREY, *Plato* in Twelve Volumes (Vols. 5 & 6) translated by Paul Shorey. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1969.

This gesture of fighting naivety through ridicule is a typical pessimistic gesture, similar to that performed by Voltaire in the *Candide*. In fact, the word pessimism officially entered Latin indexes in the late XVIIIth century in close relation to Voltaire´s book, which contains a reaction to the concept of *optimism,* on its turn launched by Leibniz in his *Théodicée* (1710). Leibniz proposed that it was not in God's power to create a perfect world, but among possible worlds, he created the best. *Optimism,* hence, flowered in a philosophical soil, with some temporal priority: the concept spread from the intellectual sphere to currency with Voltaire´s *Candide* (1759)*,* which is a satire headed at Leibniz position and whose full title is, in fact, *Candide ou l´Optimisme*. The correlative term *pessimism* made its first appearance in this context (at some point before 1782): and it was used to criticize Voltaire´s derision. In the *Candide*, Voltaire satirizes Pangloss, an exceptional character who, despite suffering endless misfortunes, insists on defending that the world is the best of all worlds. Thus, the term "panglossianism" refers to an unfounded optimism, which leaves aside the most obvious data of experience. To a certain extent, Socrates is being panglossian in his construction of the First City, and Glaucon's mockery of calling it a "City of Pigs" refers to a pessimistic background that, although still implicit, will be displayed explicitly in the rest of the dialogue, as we shall see in the following chapter. In fact, Socrates himself will be its spokesman, since, except on specific occasions, he will abandon the naive optimism and develop a much more realistic and philosophical speech.

In Book II, then, pessimism is implicit, but evident. As Barney puts it: "Plato is evidently pessimistic about the prospects for human freedom from the worst appetitive desires"[64]. We shall come back to this. For now, it is enough to draw attention to the pessimistic background, and to say that this background will become more and more present in the dialogue, always as a counterpart to naive optimism.

In this case, the pessimistic content is implicit and can be reconstructed as follows: unnecessary pleasures are dangerous, yes, but along with a powerful instinct of survival and a precious inborn inclination towards inquire and knowledge we have, want it or not, a spontaneous and fierce drive for bodily pleasure in all its variety. Intelligence is not alone in the house, and a much wider complexity must be taken into consideration when the issue is to picture a potentially virtuous, happy and flourishing life for human beings – be it individually, be it socially. Engaging in the effort of portraying the best possible way of life – that is, engaging in "useful" utopian thought – should not be done *as if* we were different in *any* way

64 BARNEY (2001), p. 219.

from what we really are. We should not be innocent or naive. We should not pretend, in particular, that *hoi polloi* possess "the best nature": pleasure as such and love and honor are *inescapable dimensions* in the inner life of common men. And Glaucon is a common man, as probably the average reader of the *Republic*.

Final thoughts

On the whole, then, the conclusion is the following: the whole gesture of designing the First City and then rejecting is a heuristic maneuver and is part of a methodology which was already active (it is an extension of the City-soul analogy). However, it is not only that: it is also a shift between utopia and pessimism. Pessimism enters the scene camouflaged, dressed in the clothes of humor to counteract the evasive gesture and, thus, to challenge and improve the utopian struggle that is being performed. This, if we well observe, will happen again in the *Republic* in a way that the whole dialogue could be seen not only as "the first utopia ever written" (Schoefield), but, at the same time, as the first critique – or, better: as the first *challenge* – to utopia ever written. The question about desirability and practicability will, indeed, be raised once and again in the rest of the dialogue regarding the *Kallipolis* itself. This may give us a clue regarding the *Republic's* project as a whole: Plato's intentions in the *Republic* may not be to offer a "finished" model, a conclusive and path to action (Popper); much less to demolish all the proposed alternatives and signify precisely the opposite of what is explicitly proposed in them (Strauss). Instead, the *Republic* may be an engagement in utopian thought which bends critically over itself at every step and whose result is permanently open to further consideration. In few words, the *Republic* could be read as *an exercise of how to hope philosophically*, and what happens in Book II may be the first example of such an exercise, in a way that Bloch's words become completely pertinent:

> "How richly people have always dreamed (…) of the better life that might be possible. Everybody's life is pervaded by daydreams: one part of this is just stale, even enervating escapism (...) but another (…) is provocative (...) This other part has hoping at its core, and is teachable. It can be extricated from the unregulated daydream and from its sly misuse (...) Nobody has ever lived without daydreams, but it is a question of knowing them deeper and deeper and in this way keeping them trained unerringly, usefully (...) Let the daydreams grow even fuller, since this means they are enriching themselves around the sober glance (…) Then let the daydreams grow really fuller, that is, clearer, less random, more familiar, more clearly understood and more mediated

> with the course of things. So that the wheat which is trying to ripen can be encouraged to grow and be harvested"[65].

Vegetti states that "Platonic philosophy is a "philosophical theater" (...) where what is on the scene is not so much *a* philosophy, but the space and the constitutive forms of philosophical thinking in itself"[66]. We believe that, regarding the *Republic´s* utopia, something similar can be said. Thus, paraphrasing Vegetti, it seems fair to claim that what is on the scene here is not so much *a* utopia, but the space and the constitutive forms of utopian thinking in itself. In Book II, one character (Glaucon) criticizes a position advanced by other character (Socrates). When Glaucon calls the First City a "City of Pigs", a denunciation is taking place; the result is that the argument resets in a direction that adjusts better to "real facts" about human nature and human society. As Burnyeat puts it: "Plato is called a hopeless idealist, a dangerous idealist, a profound idealist (…) but his own denunciation of impractical idealism is left out of account", even if "it can tell us something about the overall project of the *Republic"*[67].

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65 BLOCH (1995), p. 16
66 VEGETTI (2010), p. 257.
67 BURNYEAT (1999), p. 301.

CHAPTER II: The Best Possible and the Impossible Best

"But what is the most important study? (...) I believe (...) that you have heard me say many times that the most important study is the idea of the good and that it is through it that fair actions and other actions become useful and profitable. You already know that's what I'm going to say and, furthermore, that we don't have enough knowledge of that idea. If, however, we do not know it, even though we know the others, it will not help us"

PLATO, *Republic* VI

I

In the previous chapter we saw some examples of how naive ideas regarding human motivation, behaviour and political organization suggested by Socrates at the beginning of the *Republic* are criticized by means of humour and ridicule and, as a result, replaced by statements that prepare the way to another vision on these topics in a movement that is fundamental to the development of the argument of the entire dialogue. We stated that Socrates´ naiveté constitutes an evasive utopian gesture, that the act of mocking at it has an implicit pessimistic root and that, being so, that the movement at stake is a movement between utopia and pessimism. In this chapter we will state that these two dimensions – the utopian and the pessimistic – can be identified throughout the rest of the work and acquire progressively an explicit content, permeating both the theories about human motivation and socio-political organization. There are, in the hard core of the *Republic*, two utopian paradigms, one psychological and another political and, simultaneously and closely related to them, two pessimistic positions regarding the same issues, that is: two pessimistic theories, one psychological and another political.

On the one hand, the *Republic* presents the theory of the tripartite soul and, based on it, an ethical paradigm: a model, enthusiastically deployed, of what a wise, virtuous and happy person would be from the point of view of individual internal experience. That person is the true philosopher. It also suggests that the true philosopher´s state of well-being is only consolidated if it involves a realm that goes beyond the intimate, that is: if it has also a social

dimension; thus, it proposes the ideal of the philosopher-king, from which the famous political paradigm, the *Kallipolis,* is built. This twofold utopia can be summarized very roughly in the following terms: human soul is a composite entity of three parts, three great nucleuses of impulses, each of which advances towards a particular object: reason, oriented towards Ideas, appetite, oriented towards bare pleasure and emotion, oriented towards recognition. These parts can conflict with each other and move autonomously in the direction of their own proper object without considering each other or taking into account the overall well-being of the compound, or they can be receptive to each other and advance together in favor of what is better for all as a whole. Since the power to know what is better for the whole is exclusive of the rational part – which is the only capable of accessing the intelligible domain and, particularly, to contemplate the Idea of the Good – reason has a natural, superior role: besides the role of knowing, that of organizing. The other parts are irrational, that is: they are good-independent sources of motivation, not capable of knowledge but only of opinion based on sense perception and, thus, linked to the realm of appearance, which is ontologically inferior; however, if well-educated and trained, they can be receptive to rational counseling. In that case, emotion joins reason in an alliance capable of influencing and taming the appetitive part, which is by nature wild and savage. Under reason´s guidance, the lower parts enjoy the best and truest pleasures of which they are capable, without disturbing the overall state of harmony. As a result, the subject sets in order his own inner life and becomes his own master, satisfying all his internal dimensions in equilibrium. At peace with himself, he bounds together the three principles "and is no longer many, but becomes one, entirely temperate and perfectly harmonious", virtuous and happy[68]. In few words, the paradigm of human personal fulfillment in the *Republic* is an intelligence-based self-mastery paradigm. In close relation to this, the *Republic* suggests that he who governs himself is in conditions to govern others. Within the logic of the city-soul analogy, the perfect city is conceived as a composite society constituted by three social classes: the power is in the hands of the philosophers, who, like reason in the soul, know, organize and legislate; below the ruling class of the philosophers, there is a tough and loyal militia (corresponding to emotions) and a large group of professional artisans of many sorts (corresponding to appetite). The lower classes are disciplined by gymnastics and music; in this way, they are conduced to true opinion and good habits, so that they can reach virtue and happiness as far as it is possible to them, not interfering in the general order of the whole but, instead, contributing to its favour.

68 *Rep*. IV 443e.

On the other hand, however, the very theory of the tripartite soul and the moral psychology that arises in deep connection to it contain a solid set of postulates that show *how* and *why* both, the wise, virtuous and happy philosopher, and, consequently, the philosopher-king and the city under his regency, are not only of dubious feasibility but even, in certain aspects, openly undesirable models. First of all, it suggests that inner conflict and polarization within the soul is inevitable or almost inevitable. Thus, stable psychic peace and unity becomes unattainable or, if attainable, hard to maintain. This is so in part due to the enormous power of the lower elements, especially of the appetitive one. In fact, the power of the appetitive part is so huge that its absolute control falls out of reach: even if reason and emotion can repress its worst impulses, they can never eradicate them completely. They will always perturb the equilibrium, emerging, for example, in dreams. Reason itself can be easily enslaved by the irrational parts and turned into an instrument to achieve their goals and, what is more, it also carries its own weaknesses, independently from any external influx: it is lazy, prone to inactivity and – what it most important – unable to reach a clear view of the Idea of the Good, which has a crucial role not only in the theoretical domain but also in the ethical one. If, exceptionally, reason comes to reach that view, another problem appears: it is not able to communicate it sufficiently. But if reason is for the most unable to reach full knowledge of the Good or to communicate it, in a strict sense, psychic harmony is not possible and the true philosopher cannot exist. If the true philosopher cannot exist, then the perfect city governed by him cannot exist either.

Against this adverse picture, however, Socrates insists that it is not impossible that the paradigms come to be. But here, again, more difficulties arise: supposing that the philosopher comes to be as the result of, say, *theia moira,* he will naturally be disinterested in public life; in such a case, it would be necessary to persuade him, or even to force him, to assume a political function; thus, even if he would be wise and virtuous, his happiness and free will would be violated in an important way. Supposing that the philosopher accepts to become king, in order to the *Kallipolis* to exist the masses under his guidance will have to be tame and clever enough to follow his advice. If it is difficult to picture a soul in which the irrational force, brutal by nature, of the lower elements can be led in such a way as to achieve psychic harmony, to imagine a society in which the bulk of the population – also mostly irrational by nature (like the elements of the soul they correspond to) – is permeable to the dictates of the rulers, is much more difficult. Lie, therefore, becomes inevitable in the *Kallipolis*. Even supposing a "noble" lie, an exceptional receptiveness towards education of the masses and a positive execution of all the institutions of the ideal city, the situation in the *Kallipolis* would be that great majority

of its inhabitants would be, in a strict sense, ignorant people and, as a result, far from true virtue and happiness. What is more: not even the philosopher-king´s happiness will be complete, since he will govern against his will. Finally, still accepting that this massive condition of general mediocrity is the closest to the ideal of peace and welfare that human society can reach and that the *Kallipolis* is, in view of that, the best possible model of organization, the *Republic* cares to call attention to the fact that, given the conditions of history, if it comes at any time to exist, it would nevertheless be condemned to decadence and, ultimately, to destruction.

This is a simplified summary of the pessimistic content of the *Republic.* The goal of this chapter will be to trace and unfold this content. To do this, we will focus on the theory of the tripartite soul and the Allegory of the cave, in a constant effort to show how pessimism slips into other spheres, in particular the epistemological, the ethical and the political. Finally, we will consider the widespread claim according to which the *Republic* is the first great work of utopianism ever written in Western literature, to conclude that it is a true claim *only if* it is simultaneously stated that the *Republic* is *also* the first great critique to utopianism ever written in Western literature.

II

The enormous proliferation of meanings of the phenomenon of utopia makes it difficult to offer a univocal definition. From a broad perspective, a utopia is a work of fiction that figures a "perfect", "paradigmatic" or "ideal" state (for the most, even if not exclusively, a *social* one) in great contrast to the particular problems of the context in which it emerges, presenting an alternative arrangement of things that is conceived as the solution for those problems and, sometimes, as the ultimate solution to problems *in general*. Thus, for example, in the Bible´s Garden of Eden – which is a great example of a religious utopia – not only difficulties of survival and coexistence among human beings are solved, but also an existence of immortality, justice and bliss *in all senses* is assured. Something very typical of utopias is, in fact, that the motivation that lay in their origin, although it implies a critical reaction, puts into play dimensions that diverge or even leave completely aside rational efforts in favour of imaginative exercises. This is the reason why they are said to be addressed to fantasy rather than to intelligence. Utopias, in few words, are an imagined anticipation of a better world to come, and the fascination they exert rests mainly in the fact that they have a strong effect over emotion, picturing things in a way that springs up great feelings of hope, many times without empiric or reasonable support. This lack of support, which is, at least in a certain way, a

weakness of utopian writings, does not, however, play against something essential related to their nature, which is that they have a great influx in action: utopias can, and usually do, influence the way in which personal life is led and even the course of history; they, in few words, have a practical and social role.

But let us, for now, stick to utopia as a literary genre. As a literary genre, Western utopian literature formally begins in the XVIth century with Thomas More´s *On the Best State of a Republic and on the New Island of Utopia,* or just *Utopia* (1516). However, although the word did not exist before More – who, indeed, created the neologism – the phenomenon existed long before More baptized it. Indeed, "Aristotle writes the *Politeia* and speaks of an "art of inventing cities", in which he says Plato participates", and the *Republic* is considered, retrospectively, the first great work of the kind[69].

The aim of this dialogue is to understand the nature of justice and injustice, what they are and how they can be realized. To accomplish that, Socrates embarks on the construction of a hypothetical scenario in which they can be observed and presents himself as a "painter of constitutions"[70]; he talks of "the city whose home is in the ideal" as "a pattern laid up in heaven"[71] and, in the famous passage of Book V, he openly assumes what we nowadays call a utopian task, when he says:

> "A pattern (παραδείγματος) (…) was what we wanted when we were inquiring into the nature of absolute justice and asking what would be the character of the perfectly just man, supposing him to exist, and, likewise, in regard to injustice and the completely unjust man. We wished to fix our eyes upon them as types and models, so that whatever we discerned in them of happiness or the reverse would necessarily apply to ourselves in the sense that whosoever is likest them will have the allotment most like to theirs" [72]

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69 AUGUSTO MORAES, M., (2012/13). The author claims that this "art of inventing cities" has deeper roots in Greek culture, guiding attention towards the description of Olympus and of Cyclopes' island in the *Odyssey,* the Five Ages myth in *Works and Days* and *Kukópolis* in Aristophanes' *The Birds.* "Plato´s *opera* seem to be the result of a long tradition of thought", she says. In the XX century, Cioran says*:* "The idea of an idyllic city is (…) an enterprise that honours the heart and discredits the intellect – How could Plato surrender to it? I forgot he is the ancestor of all these aberrations, retaken and exasperated by More, the founder of modern illusions". And also: "Frederick Copleston writes, 'under the influence of Plato's *Republic*, [More wrote] a kind of philosophical novel describing an ideal State on the island of Utopia' (*A History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pt. 2: Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy [1953; rpt. Garden City, N.Y., 1963], p. 134). Similarly, W. Windelband notes, "The ideal picture of the perfect state of society upon the island of Utopia, which More sketches in contrast to the present condition, is in its main features an imitation of the ideal state of Plato" (*A History of Philosophy*, tr. James H. Tufts [1901o; rpt. New York, 1859] II, 428)", in: *Aristotle and Utopia* Author(s): WHITE, Th. I, *Aristotle and Utopia, Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1976, p. 635.

70 *Rep.* VI 501c

71 *Rep.* IX 592a-b

72 *Rep.,* V 472c-d

Even if Socrates does a positive effort to be consequent in the philosophical argument, as the great erotic he was he simultaneously makes intermittent gestures to seduce his fellows and the reader with his speech, permanently trying to generate enthusiasm and to encourage them to look deeply into the ideal and mould their lives in accordance with it. The words that put an end to the dialogue summarizes the credo: the soul is immortal; after death, those who followed reason, who envisioned the Good and acted upon justice, will receive their prize and go on, free from the chains of the body and of the illusion of the senses, to eternity. In quite an epic mood, Socrates invokes the gods and gives, at once, an ethical recommendation and a promise of salvation:

> "If we are guided by me, we shall believe that the soul is immortal and capable of enduring all extremes of good and evil, and so we shall hold ever to the upward way and pursue righteousness with wisdom always and ever [and] we may be dear to ourselves and to the gods both during our sojourn here and when we receive our reward, as the victors in the games go about to gather in theirs. And thus, both here and in that journey of a thousand years, whereof I have told you, we shall fare well"[73]

The hopeful disposition and the emotional appeal are manifest. As Burnyeat puts it, from a certain perspective "the whole *Republic* is an exercise in the art of persuasion"[74]. In a certain way, the *Republic* is, indeed, the foundational utopia.

However, after twenty-five centuries of hermeneutic effort, diverging and even antagonistic interpretations have emerged. The common place according to which Plato´s masterpiece is the first utopia ever written has been challenged. Focusing only on the political side, some questions that have been asked are: is the *Kallipolis* really the best possible city? Is it really desirable? Does it bring justice, peace and realization for all its inhabitants? Is its realization possible, at least up to some extent? Is that extent sufficient? If it is not, what is the point of presenting it as a model? The hesitation goes back to Aristotle. In Book II of the *Politics,* Aristotle highlights that some traits of the *Kallipolis,* for example the communitarian character of children and property, play against the very essence of social life, which is plural, and states that, being so, the paradigm is not desirable. During the XXth century the utopian status of the *Republic* became one of the greatest topics of debate. On the one side, Popper´s voice sounded loud. Popper accused Plato of two charges: historicism and "utopian

73 *Rep*. X, 621c-d
74 BURNYEAT (2008) p. 308.

engineering", that is: of believing that history develops like nature, through laws of cause and effect, and that by knowing the past we can predict the future and – what is more important to us in the present context – of believing that political and moral "progress" is liable to control and planning. Plato is an engineer insofar as he designs, with an almost mathematical rigor, a social and political structure and offers an equally calculated and rigorous project to build such a structure; he is utopian insofar as he conceives the project as a "final solution" – Popper states that Plato's goal is "to achieve happiness and perfection on earth". According to Popper, Plato´s *Republic* is an obvious, conclusive and finished utopian project in the worst sense of the word, delivered together with a set of practical measures – a "path to action" – that are, essentially (as the ideal regime itself at which they head at) intolerant and antidemocratic. The *Kallipolis,* Popper says, is a "closed society", such as that wanted by Nazism or Communism; indeed, the *Kallipolis* is the cursed inspiration for a whole line of perverse utopian thought, especially that related to the XXth century totalitarian regimes.

These critiques appear on *The Open Society and its Enemies*. There, he looks at recent events and generates a fine set of reflections in two dense volumes. The first of these volumes is entirely dedicated to Plato, under the title "Plato's spell". Having survived the Wars as an intellectual and a Jew, the author, widely known for his reflection on science, attacks the detachment of the *Kallipolis* from actual facts and also the idea that the establishment of the ideal regime requires a revolutionary movement, a concrete and radical action, whose aim is to reform the *totality* of the existing order, "without leaving a stone unturned": "Both, Plato and Marx, are dreaming with an apocalyptic revolution which will radically transfigure the whole social world"[75]. This desire for transfiguration is, Popper says, absolutely perverse. Lie and manipulation, censorship and even murder and exile are notes that belong to both the *Kallipolis* and the foundational process that leads to it[76]. The underlying idea is that History is not an object subject to *tabula rasa.* The utopian politician*:*

> "calls, like Archimedes, for a place outside the social world in which he can set foot in order to raise him over his hinges. But such a place does not exist and the world must continue to function during any reconstruction"[77].

Trying to subvert history through radical means, Popper says, is completely wrong. And not only wrong, but absolutely misleading and, above all, very dangerous. In real history,

75 POPPER (2013) p.154
76 In fact. Cf. *Rep.* VI 501a-d and VII 540e -541a
77 POPPER Ibidem. p. 156.

every change – particularly those related to the modes of human organization – is always slow and gradual. Still in the context of utopianism, Popper launches another criticism. He accuses Plato of "*aestheticism"*: Plato wants the legislator of the *Republic* to work "like a painter" (and we have already seen that Socrates presents himself as a "painter of constitutions"), starting from scratch, cleaning up whatever may be on the canvas, to immediately print his inspired vision of splendor. Popper recognizes in Plato the artist, the poet... but suggests that he writes under the influence of muses as if he were creating a "dream of beauty", an "idyll of justice", not as if he was doing philosophy. That dream of beauty of the inspired poet and that dream of perfection of the historical engineer, Popper warns, causes a particular kind of exaltation that mixes with rational speculation, perverting it by means of imagination. This is the reason why it is not harmless: a utopian ideal thus conceived easily becomes a means to justify totalitarianism. Here is the heart of the criticism:

> "[Plato] was an artist and, like many of the best artists, he tried to visualize a model, a "divine original" […] His trained philosophers are men who saw the truth of what is beautiful and just and good and can bring heaven to earth […] The Platonic politician composes cities for the love of beauty […] This [...] extreme radicalism of Plato is linked to aestheticism, that is, to the desire to build a world that is not only a little better and more rational than ours, but that is free from all its ugliness (…) This aestheticism is a very understandable attitude; in fact, I believe that most of us suffer a little from such dreams of perfection. But this aesthetic enthusiasm only becomes valuable when restrained by reason […] otherwise, it will be a dangerous enthusiasm, liable to develop in some form of neurosis or hysteria"[78]

According to Popper, then, the "dreams of perfection" of the *Republic* are not "restrained by reason". Let us keep this in mind, because this is exactly what we will try to prove not true here. For now, however, let us say one last thing regarding Popper´s critique. According to him, there is still another risk, another fatal problem with the proposal of the *Republic*. Once the *Kallipolis* is founded, the constituted State must be preserved at all costs: even if the eventual decay is recognized as inevitable by Plato[79], all the institutions and rules of the regime will work to maintain the established order to the maximum possible extent. In the Platonic *Republic*, says Popper, there is a static, museological character, a total and absolute immobility, so that no change, novelty, creativity or inventiveness – no freedom – is possible. He has a strong point here. As the Latin axiom states: *Summum jus, summa injuria* (supreme

78 POPPER Op. Cit. p. 154.
79 In fact, Cf. *Rep.* VIII-IX

law is supreme injustice). Consider education in the *Kallipolis:* the "qualities" of the "best by nature" will be identified and encouraged from childhood through rigorous physical and emotional training *by the authorities*. The dominant logic, defined *by the authorities,* will be introduced from early age, and the pedagogical process will be under the exclusive direction *of the authorities*. The official narrative will use a noble lie to persuade the citizens of original inequality and everyone will understand what their place is in the social organization. Art will be monitored in the *Kallipolis* according to the official logic and narrative and, in general, apart from the classic hermeneutic extremisms, censorship will play a fundamental role in the perfect city. All this really evokes the totalitarian methods of the XXth century; in particular, the similarity is very strong in what has to do with art: Plato offers detailed guidelines for art, forbids the creator to present himself publicly without prior authorization from the political power, and "invites" them to leave the city if their ideas differ from the official ones established[80]. It is very natural to think here, for example, the propaganda machine of the Nazi regime.

For the above reasons, then, Popper accuses Plato of perfectionism. For him, there is an intransigent radicalism in the *Republic* that even a hypothetical and unlikely benevolent dictator could not do without. On the whole, Popper suggests that the legislator's and the philosopher´s task should never mix with that of the artist and of the engineer. Political theorization should propose, instead, actions capable of gradually alleviating existing difficulties, and not to subvert the world in order to develop an aesthetic object for contemplation.

As Vegetti points out, the philosophical community reacted immediately, in many cases through extreme exegesis of the *Republic*[81]. He quotes here several important names. He states that Julia Annas, for example, tried to demonstrate that the *Republic´s* political content is tangential, secondary, and that the real aim of the whole dialogue is an *ethical* one. For her, Vegetti says, there is not such a thing like a political proposal in Plato´s *Republic*, much less a political utopia[82]. Strauss´ and Bloom´s reading goes further, as long as it states that everything in the *Republic* signifies *exactly the contrary* of what is explicitly defended, even the political arguments and, above all, the utopian project of the *Kallipolis.* According to Strauss, an "ironical-comical", "dissimulative" and "self-refutative" intention lies beneath the utopian construction of the *Republic;* consequently, the utopian message "must be understood

80 Cf. *Rep* III and X.
81 VEGETTI (2010), pp. 175 et seq.
82 Ibidem.

as being exactly the opposite to the one explicitly defended". The *Republic* is, for them, something like a piece of satirical writing, its contents having nothing to do (against Popper) neither with a positive political or social philosophical theory, nor with a serious path to action.

These alternative readings (born perhaps, as Vegetti suggests, as a desperate reaction to Popper´s critique which puts one of the most fundamental pillars of Western thought in check) were not able, however, to abolish the idea – or, better, the hesitation regarding the idea – that the *Republic* is a utopian writing. The issue is still a very actual one; it is an unsolved issue which has, as we have seen, a long history but remains actual – and unsolved – at the beginning of the XXIst century. In fact, as recently as September 2020, for example, Luc Brisson published an article entitled "Plato's Political Writings: a Utopia?"[83]. The important thing about all this in the present context is that it makes clear that there is something odd regarding the utopian nature of Plato´s *Republic,* since there seem to be good and strong motives both to defend that the *Republic* is a utopia and that it is *not*.

Our suggestion here is that it would be useful to formulate the problem in the following terms: is it really necessary to answer the question in absolute terms? Would it not be possible, perhaps, to avoid Manichaeism and conclude that the *Republic* contains, at the same time, a utopia and a critique of such utopia without thereby necessarily becoming contradictory, paradoxical, satirical? The difficulty would rather lie in trying to make sense of the gesture by which utopia is constructed and criticized, finding – or, perhaps, constructing – a possible meaning for such a gesture, if it exists.

This is what we will try to do in the next sections. We will state the *Republic* is, indeed, the first great work of utopianism ever written but, at the same time, the first great critique to utopianism ever written; that it offers several paradigms (among which the political and the psychological are in a way the most relevant ones) but, in parallel, develops several argumentative lines that play against that very paradigms, making the reader hesitate about them. The reader´s *hesitation* will be fundamental to us. We will suggest that to elicit this hesitation is, to a great extent, an intentional movement performed by Plato, mainly due to the fact that together with the utopian discourse and *as its counterpart*, there is, at the core of the *Republic,* a coherent philosophical orientation, that is: a set of metaphysical, epistemological, ethical and political positions, that play against that very discourse and which can be labelled as pessimistic. It is the alternate movement between utopia and pessimism that marks, and in a strong way determines, the logical cadence of the argument, insofar as it is in view of the

83 BRISSON (2020)

pessimistic appreciations that utopian ideas are criticized and the argument reset, the upshot being that no "final solution" is offered within the text. The final solution, instead, has to do, precisely, with hesitation and, in a way, the most challenging philosophical effort must be performed *by the reader,* after he reaches the end of the dialogue.

III – The issue of feasibility

But it is not only the reader who hesitates about the desirability and the possibility of realization of the paradigms offered in the *Republic*. Plato puts Socrates and his interlocutors themselves to hesitate as well. As a matter of fact, we can consider that this – namely, that the paradigms are challenged *from within*, both explicitly and implicitly – is something that distinguishes the utopias presented in the *Republic* and makes them properly *philosophical*, not just pieces of literary fiction. This may be one of the things that makes the *Republic "*odd" as a utopian writing.

Consider, for example, the issue of feasibility. Plato insists on it several times during the dialogue, bringing always a strong tension. Each time the topic comes into discussion, Socrates tries to discard it as an irrelevant problem. In Book V he asks, for example, if we would disapprove of a painter who had brought into the canvas the most beautiful human figure, but could not point at any particular individual as its model[84]. Does positive existence or non-existence of the source of inspiration diminish the artistic value of the masterpiece? In doing this, he suggests that the effort to build a political and psychological paradigm is important to social and ethical progress, independently of whether they can or cannot be realized. This is a modern idea. In modern times, when utopian discourse has already been baptized and its characteristics more or less identified, it is also recognized, as we quickly said before, that, together with the critical value of utopian constructions (which are born as a reaction towards existing problems, presenting alternatives that correct or eliminate them), utopias are not historically inoperative but have the potential to influence the course of events and, therefore, the power to create positive conditions for real reforms. Socrates seems to be well aware of this, when he asks: "Is it possible for anything to be realized in deed as it is spoken in word, or is it the nature of things that action should partake of exact truth less than speech?"[85]. "Then don't insist", he continues

84 *Rep*., V, 472d
85 *Rep.,* V, 473a

> "that I must exhibit as realized in deed precisely what we expounded in words. But if we can discover how a state might be constituted *most nearly* answering to our description, you must say that we have discovered that possibility of realization which you demanded"[86]

So even if the perfect state is not possible to be achieved as such, the possibility of *approximation* is enough, at least for Socrates, to justify the construction. "Will you not be content?", he asks I Book V, "Yes, I will", Glaucon answers, condescendingly.

But neither Glaucon nor Socrates are completely satisfied, and in book VI the issue appears once again. There, Socrates says, regarding the political paradigm, that considering *all the course of time*, there *must be* a possibility, even if a *remote* one, that such a man as the philosopher-king comes in some moment to exist:

> "Will anyone contend that there is no chance that the offspring of kings and rulers should be born with the philosophic nature? (…) And can anyone prove that if so born they must necessarily be corrupted? The difficulty of their salvation we too concede; but that in all the course of time not one of all could be saved, will anyone maintain that? (…) The occurrence of one such is enough if he has a state which obeys him, to realize *all that now seems so incredible* (…) And further, that these things are best, if possible, has already (...) been sufficiently shown (…) Our present opinion, then, (...) is that our plan would be best if it could be realized and that this realization is difficult, yet not impossible"[87]

This act of searching a minimal instant in eternity in which the model´s realization could be found shows how strong Plato's anxiety is. Indeed, he never gets rid of it, and he assumes that all that is being said "seems incredible" (ἀπιστέω). The thought here goes back to the conclusions of the previous chapter: it seems to be very important for Plato that the utopian impulse does not stray from the conditions of experience so much as to become absolutely antagonistic to them. Utopia, which is a powerful source of motivation and is, at least potentially, a means to improve life, should have a strong link with reality, and must be constantly reviewed according to this parameter.

The point here is that Plato is never completely satisfied with the breadth of the distance that separates the models from reality in the *Republic*; rather, he puts Socrates himself to be alert that the proposal is not separated from facts so that it becomes ridiculous (*geloion*) or a mere wish-thought (*euché*) and uses the other characters of the dialogue to bring the issue

86 *Rep.,* V, 473a-b
87 *Rep.* VI 592a-c

once and again[88]. This, we should highlight, is not (or at least not only) an issue related to the distance between words and facts, but something much more profound: it is a concern, as we will try to show in the next sections, related to the possibility of realization of the models *in view of human nature and condition*. This, we take it, is one of the most relevant reasons that lie behind the topic of feasibility and that make the utopian nature of the *Republic* odd[89].

We may pose the question in this way: which are the ideas that play against the feasibility and desirability of the paradigms? We will rehearse an answer in the following terms: both paradigms are unfeasible, and even undesirable, because the very structure of the soul in which they rest is in many important senses refractory to it.

IV – The unavoidable *stasis* and "The Brute within"

In Book IV of the *Republic* Plato starts from the implicit theory that human soul is essentially a collection of potential movements[90] or impulses (ὁρμή), and wants to know whether, given that there are different kinds of action (such as understanding, feeling anger or desiring bodily pleasures), those actions originate in the soul *as a whole* (ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ) or, rather, if there are *distinct* sources of motivation within the soul from which, more accurately speaking, they arise[91]. Having left behind the reflection on the three social classes of the city, the reader could expect that Plato proceeded simply by observing different behaviours of a subject that, let us say, *thinks* at one moment and *gets angry* at another, to then try to find the difference between these actions, for example, by speculating about the proper object of the impulses that elicit them (what, in fact, he does later). However, this is not the way in which he proceeds. Instead, he puts into play a theoretical principle and two cases in which the subject experiences *conflicting impulses*. The theoretical principle, known as the Principle of opposites[92], states that "the same thing (ταὐτὸν) will never do or suffer opposites in the same respect, in relation to the same thing and at the same time"[93]. The two cases are that of a thirsty person who restrains from drinking and of a person who feels rejection of a corpse, but ends up observing it and rebuking herself for doing so. The upshot will be that these persons, since they

88 *Rep.* V 450d, VI 499c, VII 540d. Cf. also *Rep.* V 456; VIII, 546a; IX, 592a-b.
89 A divergent interpretation regarding the role of the question about the feasibility of the paradigm in: ARAUJO, C. (2009).
90 A theory which is present also in the *Phaedrus* 245c-e and in *Laws* 896a, where the soul is seen as *autokíneton,* that is, as a movement which moves itself.
91 *Rep.* IV 436a-b
92 Regarding the nomenclature of this principle Cf. COSTA RUGNITZ, N (2012), p. 14-16
93 *Rep.* IV 436 b-c. Cf. ZUPPOLLINI, B. (2019) p. 47.

undergo the opposites in the above mentioned ways, are not the same, that is, they are not one, identical to their-selves, but many, in a certain way different from their-selves. We shall come back to this immediately, but it is worth saying a further word about this way of proceeding. In the context of the establishment of the social classes in the city, there is no reference at all to the phenomenon of inner opposition, that is, in the case, of civil war. There is no correspondent to psychic *stasis* in the initial steps of the construction of the *Kallipolis,* and it is not by means of inner dissension that the classes of the city are established. In Book II Socrates introduces the guardians in the context of the luxurious city: since many more supplies than those that are strictly necessary are required to sustain the *opson*, the city would need to expand its territorial limits and, in order to do this, soldiers and a whole army would be introduced. This is the logic that underlies the first division of the social classes in the political argument of the *Republic.* As we saw in the previous chapter, it is a flawed idea regarding the origin and the causes of war, but it is one that works within the development of the argument. It could also have worked here, but Plato decides to take a different path. Why is *stasis* included in Book IV, when the argument about the soul begins? We could well think that, if Socrates does so, even if without any obvious reason or justification, he might be trying to highlight something. But even if he did not intentionally mean to highlight something, the fact is that something is indeed highlighted, namely: that the phenomenon of inner conflict is crucial in the context of the soul. As a matter of fact, the investigation regarding the structure of human soul not only begins with, but also depends on the concept of *stasis* on every step. But let us go back to the argument now. The "cases" of psychic conflict Socrates brings to the scene are the following:

> "The soul of the thirsty (...) in so far as it thirsts, wishes nothing else than to drink, and yearns for this and its impulse is towards this (…) Then, if anything draws it back when thirsty, it must be something different in it from that which thirsts and drives it like a beast (ὥσπερ θηρίον) to drink. Are we to say, then, that some men sometimes though thirsty refuse to drink? (…) What then (…) should one affirm about them? Is it not that there is something in the soul that bids them drink and a something that forbids, a different something that masters that which bids? (…) And is it not the fact that that which inhibits such actions arises when it arises from the calculations of reason, but the impulses which draw and drag (ἄγοντα καὶ ἕλκοντα) come through affections and diseases? (…) Not unreasonably (…) shall we claim that they are two and different from one another, naming that in the soul whereby it reckons and reasons the rational and that with which it loves, hungers, thirsts, and feels the flutter and titillation of other desires, the

> irrational and appetitive—companion of various repletions and pleasures."[94]
>
> "Leontius the son of Aglaion, on his way up from the Peiraeus under the outer side of the northern wall, becoming aware of dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution at the same time felt a desire to see them and a repugnance and aversion, and that for a time he resisted and veiled his head, but overpowered in despite of all by his desire (κρατούμενος... ὑπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας), with wide staring eyes he rushed up to the corpses and cried, 'There, you wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle! … This anecdote… signifies that the principle of anger sometimes fights against desires as an alien thing against an alien... He [the agent, that is: Leontious] reviles himself and is angry with that within which masters him and that as it were in a faction of two parties the high spirit of such a man becomes the ally of his reason."[95]

As it is commonly accepted, these episodes serve to stablish, or, better, to confirm, the soul as a composite entity and to distinguish the quality/nature of its "parts": considering the Principle of opposites, it must be concluded that the fountain of the impulses at stake cannot be one and the same (οὐ ταὐτὸν), that is: it must be concluded that the opposite impulses do not arise from the soul *as a whole* and that the soul itself is not one, but many (ἀλλὰ πλείω); not a unity, but a plurality. Within that plurality, reason (λογιστικὸν) will be characterized as something that calculates, reckons and reasons, forbids and masters; appetite (ἐπιθυμητικόν), which is irrational (ἀλόγιστος), as something that loves, hungers, thirsts and desires, drawing and dragging towards repletions and pleasure (πληρώσεών...καὶ ἡδονῶν) and spirit (θυμοειδές), as something that feels anger but that, despite being also irrational, fights against desires as an ally of rational advice. Before turning to the episodes of conflict above quoted, let us see how psychic life is described in the *Republic.* The parts are, then, at least from a certain perspective, different – or differentiable – sources of motivation, one being rational and the other two being deprived of that quality. Within the soul, irrational parts can cooperate or confront reason. Here, knowledge and education are the key-concepts.

The education of the rational part of the soul implies a long series of studies, first scientific and theoretical, then dialectical, which, in the context of the *Kallipolis,* is suggested to begin in early age and finish when the pupil is approximately fifty years old[96]. It also implies an intensive training of rational habits, since it is important that reason is also prepared to deal

94 *Rep.* IV 439a-d
95 *Rep.* IV 439e-440a
96 *Rep.* VII 534 et seq.

with inconveniences such as oblivion and tiredness[97]. Socrates warns from the start that the individuals capable of undergoing such a discipline will be a reduced minority; indeed, he makes it clear that, beyond curricular issues, to achieve rational realization it is necessary to possess certain innate characteristics, such as a natural pleasure for thinking, the ability to concentrate, good memory, etc[98]. When this is the case, and reason is adequately trained and educated, it actualizes its potentiality to know what *is*, eluding the danger of what only *appears to be* and, through deliberation, reach what is best all things considered[99]. Having achieved the highest levels of knowledge and a clear vision of the Good, reason is in conditions to organize and lead psychic life. The other elements of the soul, which are anchored in sensibility and cannot move to a cognitive state beyond opinion, can also be trained (through music and gymnastics[100]), so that they learn to pursuit their objects with moderation and to be receptive to rational advice[101]. When the whole three parts, thus educated and habituated, relate to each other, reason commanding and the irrational elements responding, when needed, then a special consonance arises:

> "Having attained to self-mastery and beautiful order within himself, and having harmonized these three principles as the notes or intervals of three terms, quite literally the lowest, the highest, and the mean (…) and having linked and bound all three together"[102]

In this way, the agent "makes of himself a unit, one man instead of many, self-controlled and in unison"[103]. When reason performs its proper function, which is to know, and,

97 *Rep.* III 412 et seq.
98 *Rep.* V 474b et seq.; VI 486 et seq.
99 Cf. *Rep* 436a9; 441e3-5; 442c5; 580d9; 441c1-2; 442c5-7, etc.
100 *Rep.* II 376- III 412d
101 "Rational motivations, unlike appetitive ones, are not blind to other interests that the agent may have. On the contrary, they result from the practice of putting into perspective the set of your desires and determining what is the most effective way to satisfy the greatest possible number of them, including establishing which ones should be prioritized over others" ZUPOLLINI (2019). The rational part "reasons about better and worse but also is capable of knowledge about what is beneficial for each part of the soul and for the whole soul in common (442c6-8). The rational part "is guided by reasoning about what is best, all things considered, for the whole soul and for each of its parts (...) The desires of the rational part, in contrast to those of the spirited part, rest on deliberation about what would be best, all things considered, for myself as a whole" IRWIN (1995) 215-216.
102 *Rep.* IV 443d-e
103 *Rep.* IV 443e

in particular, to know the Truth (ἀλήθεια)[104] and Idea of the Good (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα)[105] and to master (ἄρχειν)[106] in accordance with that knowledge, then:

> "the entire soul (...) is not filled with inner dissension (μὴ στασιαζούσης), [and] the result for each part is that it in all other respects keeps to its own task and is just, and likewise that each enjoys its own proper pleasures and the best pleasures and, so far as such a thing is possible, (εἰς τὸ δυνατόν), the truest."[107]

This is a sketch of the psychological utopia of the *Republic.* It is a paradigm of order, based on rational virtue. In fact, when reason accomplishes its proper function, then its proper virtue, which is wisdom, arises.

But we should notice two things here. First, the paradigm of psychic realization has the absence of self-differentiation, that is, the absence of *stasis*, as one of its main characteristics. This was what we meant when we said that *stasis* is fundamental to the *Republic´s* argument about human soul not only at its beginning, but at every step. Second, the psychic paradigm is not a matter of rational development only, and Socrates cares to pay attention also to the well-being of the irrational elements, who, at least in the optimal functioning of the soul, are not simply silenced or repressed, but also enjoy their own pleasures and even become virtuous (courage is the virtue of the spirited part; moderation, that of the appetitive[108]). But he adds the expression εἰς τὸ δυνατόν. What does this mean? We could think that it means – in absolute accordance with the theory of the soul expressed in the rest of the dialogue – that the plenitude of the irrational parts is secondary in value in the context of human realization. In the context of human realization, it only matters that reason fulfils its proper function, and that the others just do not "disturb". But this brings a big issue: do the irrational parts not have *also* their proper object, function, virtue? As we previously saw, they do. We may call this "the problem of the irrational parts proper function". One could think that rational realization plays against the realization of the irrational ones. The irrational parts can be educated, that is true, and reach satisfaction "up to a point". However, this implies that they do not, strictly speaking, "keep to their own task". The proper object of the appetitive part, for example, is to look for pleasure without any consideration of the overall Good; but if the

104 *Rep.* IX 572a
105 *Rep.* VI 505a
106 The rational *érgon* is "to rule, being wise and exercising forethought in behalf of the entire soul, and to the principle of high spirit to be subject to this and its ally" *Rep*. IV 441e; the irascible *érgon* is to "preserve in the midst of pains and pleasures the rule handed down by the reason as to what is or is not to be feared" *Rep*. IV 442c
107 *Rep.* IX 587a. When there is no *stasis*, there is "cooperation with one-self" and "self-agreement" (*Rep.* I 352a).
108 *Rep.* IV 441c et seq.

paradigm of self-mastery implies that it reduces and adjusts its impulses according to the advice of reason, that is, according to something exterior to it, then we will have an appetitive part, in a certain way, impoverished, mutilated. Obviously, this should not be taken as a defence of the opposite option, that is, the one that defends the free rein of appetitive impulses without any type of control or measure. Hedonism, as we saw in Chapter I, has catastrophic effects in the long term, linked mainly to the impossibility of final satisfaction and, thus, to eternal lack. But the reader may still consider that the predominance given to the role of the rational impoverishes interior life and human experience *in an excessive way*. A similar consideration arises when Socrates legislates regarding music in Book III, leaving aside certain rhythms and melodies that can affect the irascible part in a "negative" way, causing too much exaltation[109]. This, again, in a certain way impoverishes human experience. But this is exactly what Socrates is suggesting. He is suggesting that the irrational part of our experience should be impoverished in order to have a good life, for example when he states, in Book X, that poetry "waters and fosters feelings when what we ought to do is to dry them"[110]. And there is also the hydraulic metaphor in Book VI:

> "when in a man the desires incline strongly to any one thing, they are weakened for other things. It is as if the stream had been diverted into another channel"[111]

In other words: it seems that, somehow, reason takes the energy of emotion and desire to itself. The reader, thus, hesitates. He hesitates about the desirability of the psychic paradigm because, even if he can recognize the exceptional conditions that make reason the key element for a good life, he cannot help suspecting that the emphasis on reason and rationality is rather overweening and that it may derive in too much a strong debilitation of emotion and desire. This suspicion increases, for example, when he discovers that the appetitive part is presented as a multi-headed beast, which is a way of saying that there are no good exemplars in the appetitive part, but that each of them, and them as a whole, are obstacles to the good life (which, as we will see immediately, seems to be precisely what is being defended). Perhaps this hesitation is the product of an inability *by the reader* to accept – borrowing an expression from economic theory – the "opportunity costs" of moderate living as Plato presents it; perhaps it is just a romantic nostalgia for *catharsis*. But resuming the content of the psychic paradigm and

109 *Rep.* III 398e-399e
110 *Rep.* X 606d
111 *Rep.* VI 485d

the message of the hydraulic metaphor, the impression is that reason may drain the other parts of the soul, reduce it to the minimum or even dry them completely, while she herself becomes obese. Unfortunately, this possibility is never considered explicitly in the *Republic.* Independently of that, however, the reader is led to hesitation and suspicion.

But there are other motives for hesitation, now regarding the possibilities of the realization of the psychological utopia. As soon as in Book IV, and immediately after having described the psychological paradigm, Socrates observes that "while there is *one* form of excellence, the forms of evil are *infinite*"[112]. This is a quick remark, but one of great importance to us, since we are tracking the ways in which Plato opposes utopia through pessimism. From the infinite spectrum of psychic evil, Socrates will describe just four. He will undertake this investigation in Books VIII and IX, distinguishing types of psychological dynamics based on the relationship of government and subordination of the different parts of the soul, speaking of the timocratic person, who is ruled by spirit, and of three more types, which have the appetitive element as the one in the command: the oligarchic type will be commanded by the so called necessary appetites, which are the impulses indispensable to survival (such as feeding, housing and procreation); the democratic, by the unnecessary ones (that is: by random desires of hedonistic pleasures) and the tyrannical by *paranomoi* appetites (which are presented as vicious and perverted appetites). We shall come back to this distinction between appetites later. Now, however, we are ready to return to the cases in Book IV: that of the thirsty man and that of Leontious´.

There are many problems regarding Leontious´ desire to look at the corpses and the origin of the repugnance that leads him to withdraw; however, there is a more or less general consensus that what is at stake here is an appetitive impulse on the one side and a rational on the other, and that the whole picture is presented in order to distinguishing a third kind of impulse, namely, that arising from spirit in alliance with reason, when Leontious becomes angry with himself for looking at the corpse. There are problems also regarding the thirsty man´s case. Again, however, let us follow the simple reading, according to which what is at stake here is a conflict between reason and appetite. The passage does not offer many elements for interpretation, but let us say, for example, that the conflicted person does not drink because she *knows* the available water is contaminated and praises health as a good, that is: a condition for life and more precisely for good life. The point here is to call attention to a subtle difference between the way in which these instances of psychic conflict are experienced by the agents[113].

112 *Rep.* IV 445c
113 An initial consideration of this difference can be found in COSTA RUGNITZ, N (2012) pp. 21-37

The question is: to which type of psychological dynamic each of the characters correspond? Leontious, perhaps, is of an oligarchic type, undergoing the transition to the democratic kind as described in Book VIII: the oligarchic soul is not permissive regarding desires other than those that assure survival; however, unnecessary desires – desires of "entertainment and display"[114] - still claim for satisfaction. Socrates says that during the transformation from the oligarchic to the democratic, concupiscible "leaks" begin to take place but are initially controlled, because "there is still a sense of awe and reverence" in the soul[115], which means that, far from being condescending to the hedonistic desires, the agent fights against them. An unnecessary, rare and morbid desire emerges from the depths of Leontious´ interior; it is an unnecessary desire and a desire that disturbs him; therefore, it is evident that he is not, or, better, not *yet*, of the democratic type. However, the conditions are given for the desire in question to appear and, finally, to prevail. Throughout the process, Socrates makes it clear that the internal opposition that takes the soul of Aglaion's son clearly implies a conflict with all the characteristics of a civil war, that is: with different factions fighting each other, as in a battlefield. But what about the thirsty man? To which type of psychological dynamic does he belong? His circumstance is notoriously much less violent than Leontious´ (which, by the way, does not mean that it is not sufficient to reveal an internal partition of the soul). Even if the repulsion implies a certain discomfort for the thirsty man, it does not trigger an internal battle; quite on the contrary, appetite accepts it quickly and without offering any kind of resistance to reason´s counselling. Thus, it is not in view of a *battle* between knowledge and appetite that perturbation arises, but because thirst has not been satiated. The thirsty man´s suffering has to do with a physiological state, a physiological unsatisfied impulse, but the parts in his soul reach a consensus; Leontious´ case, however, is different, since in his case one faction is overpowered by the other (appetite overpowers reason), there is winner and a looser. Being so, his suffering has a distinct quality: it is somehow moral, as long as he recognizes that he had lost the battle, that he failed to follow the best path of action, which was not to look at the corpses. Thus, the thirsty man could perfectly be of the aristocratic type, that is: he could perfectly be a "master of himself", who knows what is better all considered and acts in accordance. This difference between the two cases in Book IV allows us to draw several conclusions, among which the most relevant in the present context is that psychic conflict may differ in intensity and quality, and it is not only conflict in its most extreme manifestations – those that can be compared with a civil war – which show the fragmentation of the soul; instead, there are some cases, *even extremely*

114 *Rep.* IX 572c
115 *Rep.* VIII 560a

habitual and trivial situations, that, despite being much less dramatic, are enough to divide or indicate the division of man in relation to himself. For one instant, immediately before the consensus, the thirsty man, who is a master of himself and, thus, *one*, becomes *many*. This is a very serious issue regarding the utopia of the "harmonic" soul. If conflict, even in its "soft" manifestations, occurs in the master-of-himself, then the paradigm meets an insurmountable limit. Thus, Lorenz says:

> "Appetite's stubborn and inflexible attachment to whatever happens to give a person pleasure renders psychological conflict ineliminable (...) For one thing, what gives us pleasure is in large part determined by brute physiological facts about the constitution and condition of our body. (...) For these reasons, Plato thinks that even in the well-disposed, virtuous soul, reason and spirit will need to watch over appetite, and will on occasion need to 'weed out' inappropriate desires that appetite will give rise to. (…) Appetite's attachment to what in fact gives us pleasure is unreformable. What appetite motivates us to pursue can be reformed only by reforming what in fact gives us pleasure, within the rather stringent limits imposed by physiological facts. There is thus something ineliminably and unreformably brutish about appetite, not only about how it functions, but also about what it motivates us to pursue."[116]

This warning becomes more alarming when we consider that, in relation to the point we are highlighting here, the issue is not about *pleasure*: it is about survival. In Book IV, Plato cares to distinguish "bare thirst" of "mere drink" (appetites for generic objects) from whatsoever other qualified thirst that may exist[117]. This, we take it, is to say that desire of drinking (and also for food and sex) *as such* is not, at least in a certain, fundamental sense, a desire for pleasure. It is a survival drive, a necessary desire, independent of any further qualification. Then, the psychological utopia finds a very clear, immovable and ineliminable limit: the appetitive, irrational and physiologic desire of survival. Not even the master of himself can do without inner fragmentation. *Stasis,* at least in its "soft" variant is, in a certain way, unavoidable. And a psychological ideal that tries to do without this fact is simply inappropriate. There is no possible *stable* unity and identity, and even "the best natures", those who never fall into *akrasia,* will experience internal conflict, self-differentiation and inner fragmentation.

As we have been saying, s*tasis* is a key-concept for the psychological speculation of the *Republic:* even if it was not necessary, the investigation regarding the structure of human

116 LORENZ (2006), p. 2.
117 *Rep.* IV 437 et seq.

soul begins with it and depends on it on every step. So, we shall now resume the question of the beginning: Why, against the logic of the city-soul analogy, is *stasis* included in Book IV, when the argument about the soul begins? We may now extend our previous answer, saying that it is because it is something essential to the human soul. It is like if, having observed that internal conflict is a (or perhaps *the most*) prominent characteristic of human subjectivity, Plato wanted to find out how the soul´s inner nature should be in order to conflict to take place the way it, inescapably, does. And if there is no possible *stable* unity and identity, and even "the best natures" experience internal conflict and self-differentiation, then the psychological ideal state is not, strictly speaking, feasible. The ideal is fallible. And, again, the reader hesitates.

And there is still another powerful reason to hesitate about the psychological utopia. The appetitive part of the soul plays a crucial role in this context. In the previous chapter we saw several ways in which Plato describes it in the *Republic*. It is the soul´s most abundant element. It is insatiable (ἀπληστότατον) and irrational (ἀλόγιστος) by nature[118]. Among the enormous diversity within the appetitive element, there are three main varieties: *necessary* desires, such as hunger, thirst and sexual impulse, related to physiological requests and whose elimination results in elimination of life[119], *unnecessary* desires[120], independent from any biological need and headed at pleasure and *lawless* desires, immoral impulses which are the basis of vice and criminal behavior[121]. There is an illustration in Book IX which eloquently expresses the point. Socrates is trying to explain Glaucon his conception of the human soul, so he asks to visualize an image – "What sort of an image?", Glaucon asks, and Socrates replies:

> "One of those natures that the ancient fables tell of (...) as that of the Chimaeras or Scylla or Cerberus, and the numerous other examples that are told of many forms grown together in one (…) Mould, then, a single shape of a manifold and many-headed beast that has a ring of heads of tame and wild beasts and can change them and cause to spring forth from itself all such growths. Then fashion one other form of a lion and one of a man and let the first be far the largest and the second in size (…) Join the three in one, then, so as in some sort to grow together (…) Then mould about them outside the likeness of one, that of the man, so that to anyone who is unable to look within but who can see only the external sheath it appears to be one living creature, the man"[122]

118 *Rep.* IV 442a See also 506b, 588c
119 *Rep.* X 558d
120 *Rep.* X 571b and X 558d respectively
121 *Rep.* X 571c et seq. Cfr. Parry, 2007, translates "μιαιφονεῖν τε ὁτιοῦν, βρώματός τε ἀπέχεσθαι μηδενός" (*Rep.,* IX 571b-d) as "a contamination of the blood and eating forbidden food" and quotes Adam (1962, vol II, pp. 319-20), who, according to him, suggests that Socrates is referring to parricide and cannibalism.
122 *Rep.* IX 588c-e

So appetite is savage, brutal, violent; it is like a "manifold and many-headed beast": "the brute within", as Lorenz baptized it. Our point here is that, among the types of appetite identified by Plato, it is very difficult to decide which of them correspond to the "tamed heads of the beast": such is the violence allotted to *all* of them. In the thirsty man case that occupied us up to now, for example, when Plato introduces the most basic kind of appetitive impulse, namely, thirst, he presented it as an *uncontrollable craving* that *drags* the individual "like a beast" towards drinking. This kind of adjectives raises the idea that this kind of impulses, namely, the necessary impulses, are not the ones that correspond to the idle components of the appetitive element, that is, that they do not correspond to the tamed heads of the beast. At least in a certain, but yet fundamental, way, it partakes of the wild ones, like all necessary desires. Further evidence of this can be found in the first book, when Plato gives a hint of the strength and violence of these impulses when he makes Cephalus say that old age has brought him an unprecedented "freedom and peace", as long as it has rid him of sexual appetites, as if he had run away "from a raging and savage beast of a master"[123].

When the second kind of appetites is distinguished (the unnecessary or purely hedonistic desires), we immediately remember Book II, when Socrates was forced to give up the "City of pigs" and accept that the desire for the superfluous is unavoidable. In that context, his initial attempt was to do without this crave of human nature, but he was prevented to maintain such an evasive position. In Book IX, the point is made clearer: there, Plato states that the desire for unnecessary pleasures, if treated with licentiousness, run out of control. Hedonism turns into vice quickly, and the thought here is that idle appetites, appetites for "entertainment and display"[124] (such as, let us say, the mere enjoyment of a piece of art or of a party with friends), are potential and imminent dangers to the balance of the soul. In fact, we must remember that the tame heads of the beast are precisely that: tame heads of *a beast.* That the third type of appetites, the lawless appetites, do not correspond to the tame heads: that is evident. What do we have left, then? Which are the "tame heads of the beast"? Which are those appetitive pleasures that the agent can enjoy in peace, without needing to be permanently in a vigilant attitude in order to detect if they imply any potential psychic conflict? The impression is that *there are no tame appetites*, in the sense that, strictly speaking, each and every component of the appetitive part of the soul is dangerous or potentially dangerous to psychic harmony[125].

123 *Rep.* I 329c-d
124 *Rep.* 558d; 572e-573a
125 Another alternative is that these kinds of pleasures are "the pleasures connected with smell" and other similar to them that may exist. In Book IX (584 b-c), Plato refers to these kind of pleasures as "pure pleasures", independent of any kind of opposition with pain.

In few words, then, one clear thing that plays against the psychological utopia is the very nature of appetite; the choice of the monstrous creature, its power and ferocity, to represent it, is strong enough to resume the point.

In the antipodes of utopia, one could think that, if there are no tame appetitive desires, then we are all subject to *akrasia* and, even worse, to irrational belief change about what is good (in fact, a desire is tame to the extent it can be influenced by beliefs about the good, and if there are desires that cannot or cannot practically be influenced by beliefs about the good, that is, if they are not influenced by learning anything about their object, then, as Lorenz said, there is something ineliminable and unreformably brutish about appetite and about what it motivates us to pursue). If that is true: how could psychic "unison" possible take place?

On the other hand, we should also consider something that is said regarding the management of desires in Book VIII: some desires can be managed by persuading them to retreat, others, by keeping them from coming into existence and others, still, by directly suppressing them by force[126]. However, it should not go unnoticed that Socrates states that the worst kind of desires, that is, the *paranomoi,* "are to be found in us all (…) even in some reputed most respectable"[127]. He also claims that these desires can be repressed, but not completely eradicated, since they will "reappear in dreams"[128]. In such a context, we cannot help asking, first: who are these "some reputed most respectable"? Is Plato referring to the "master of himself"? If yes, we are facing here something similar to what happened in relation to the unavoidable *stasis*: the master of himself, even if he can prevent lawless desires from express in action or, before that, from taking control of the soul and subvert the just order and harmony, he will be anyway perturbed by them; in dreams, in this case. So, again, the state of stable psychic peace and inner cohesion, if it comes sometime to exist, cannot be maintained because, on the one hand, strictly speaking there are no inoffensive and tame appetites and, on the other, no matter how much effort, study and training, human soul simply cannot get rid of immoral impulses that elicit fragmentation. It is clear that the possibility of preventing both these things, that is, *stasis* and *paranomoi* impulses, from reaching the scope of action is always possible. But we are not talking about action here, but about subjective experience. And from the point of view of subjective experience, there is good ground for pessimism.

And the argument stands even if there are just fewer tame appetitive desires than we thought: not only *akrasia*, *stasis* and irrational belief change, but also psychic danger and

126 *Rep.* VIII 554c-d
127 *Rep*. IX 572a
128 *Rep*. IX 571b-572b

the need to be in a *constant attitude of surveillance and repression*, gain a force that definitely plays against the paradigm, since the appropriate management of irrational phenomena becomes more and more difficult. Even the master of himself is an enemy of himself. This is not a claim about the alternative of an eventual approximation to the ideal, which remains open – the possibility of *the best* is out of reach, not the possibility of *the better* –; it is a claim about how the ideal of the enlightened philosopher has important failures and does not assure a happy and peaceful life in the most complete sense of the expression. As we shall see later, life can be *improved*, but never *perfected*, and it is a matter of minimizing harm, a matter of degrees and imperfect realization.

But let us come back to the image of the soul in Book IX. Together with the manifold beast, the image situates reason sharing the house with a lion, which represents spirit, and in this way the compound of irrational forces within the soul is completed. The proper object of the irascible part is honour and recognition, or, to put it clear, respect, esteem and – we can say, perhaps moving dangerously away from the text, but still drawing conclusions implied by it – love (self-love and love of and for others). For this reason, the image of the lion seems suitable: it has a certain beauty that appetite lacks. This part of the soul is presented throughout the dialogue as something akin to the rational (it is an "intermediate" element, reason´s "natural companion"[129]). But it should be noticed that this openness to alliance, however, is not only due to an essential predisposition of spirit as such, but also to a certain need on the part of reason; in fact, in a very important way, reason *needs* spirit to stablish psychic order: spirit is vehement, it is an explosive force that promotes action – and with this the image of the lion seems appropriate again – and this is something reason cannot do without since, as we shall see in the next section, reason in itself has a kind of inborn inclination to inactivity.

But the alliance between reason and spirit is not the only possibility. Plato makes it clear that if the proper context is not offered, multiple perversions can occur in the irascible element. The irascible element is presented as the fountain of a constant strive for dominance, fame and good reputation[130], liable not only to differ from rational recommendations (as in the case of Odysseus, quoted twice[131], who experiences unregulated emotions arising within him

129 *Rep.* IV 441e; 442b. As Irwin points out, this does not mean that its reactions will wait in each specific situation until they "hear" the word of the rational advising on what to feel; rather, it means that emotional tendencies can be cultivated throughout life in close contact with the exercise of reflection, in order to acquire certain habits and behaviours in accordance with it. IRWIN (1995).
130 Cf. 545a, 548c; 581a-b.
131 Cf. 390b; 441b

and “represses his heart”) but to assume the leadership of the whole soul, as in the case of the timocratic man in Book VIII: an arrogant subject, constantly looking for victory and recognition without taking into consideration any rational idea of the good. And there is another perversion: due to a character malformation, the agent can become sentimental, prone to lamentation or laughter[132]. In this context, Plato uses another image to represent spirit: that of the monkey[133], bringing in an idea of clumsiness and ridiculousness.

To close this section, we shall add one last thing. Beyond the multiple degenerations of spirit, and going back to the image of Book IX, it is clear that Plato confers to emotions a great subversive potential in the context of human soul. The lion contains a certain nobility of character when compared to the hydra-like animal, which evidently intends to represent spirit´s receptiveness to reason; however, the lion still remains a savage animal and carries, as such, a heavy content of aggressiveness. The brute within involves not only appetite, but also spirit. Being so, we can see, in all detail, the force that plays against the paradigm of psychological fulfilment.

Last, but not least, we shall pay attention to reason´s role and condition in the context of the theory of the tripartite soul. Reason, which is the soul´s most exceptional *dunamis*, is portrayed in Book IX as “a man” that is “third in size” compared to the huge body of irrational forms. This is a highly efficient way of communicating the limitations of the psychological utopia. Reason seems to be, from the start, in a situation of enormous disadvantage with respect to the brute within. This unfavourable situation will be enhanced by certain natural failures, weaknesses or limitations that affect it *from within*, that is, independently of the companions with which it shares the house. Those weaknesses and limitations are, in a certain way, the main content of the central books of the *Republic.* We shall pay attention to them now.

V - Rational weaknesses

In facing the other parties in the internal battlefield of the soul, reason, which in a way is at a great disadvantage, is susceptible to be overpowered by the irrational elements in countless ways. The bigger problem is, of course, appetite. Not only can reason be *relegated* by the power of desire, which tends, naturally, to turn a deaf ear to her advice, but, in some cases, she can be *completely forbidden* of performing its proper function and "forced to serve

132 *Rep.* X 606a-c
133 *Rep.* IX 590b

evil", that is: forced to be an instrument of the irrational elements, especially, of the appetitive part, as in the cases of the oligarchic, the democratic and the tyrannic men portrayed in Books VIII and IX. In fact, the whole process of corruption of the soul described in Books VIII and IX can be understood as a gradual liberation of more and more pernicious desires. This, we take it, is, as we suggested above, a prove that reason´s taming capacity is naturally limited by the narrow receptiveness to domestication of the irrational. But besides being susceptible to be overpowered and instrumentalized by the irrational elements in countless ways, from the most basic submission to the requests of the stomach to the impetuous demands of an uncontrolled heart, reason is also vulnerable to perversions that arise *from within*. There are several perversions of this kind. For example, in Book VII Socrates states that during the education of the young person, if he dedicates himself to theoretical discussions before the appropriate time, allowing himself to be refuted and then refuting those who refute him, he may fall into scepticism and damage his rational capacity forever[134]. However, there is one *inner* source of limitation that interests us more here: it is the one that has to do with a kind of rational inborn difficulty to transcend sense perception and opinion and, having transcended it, to visualize the objects of knowledge, the Ideas that compound the intelligible world and that constitute the dialectical enterprise and, especially, the greatest one: the idea of Good. This, we take it, is particularly stated in the famous beginning of Book VII. The Allegory of the cave, so representative of Plato's thought and so central to the *Republic*, is also central to our aim here. Julia Annas says:

> "The Cave is Plato´s most optimistic and beautiful picture of the power of philosophy to free and enlighten (…) Few thinkers (…) have given more striking, and moving, a picture of philosophical thinking as a releasing of the self from undifferentiated conformity to (...) truth"[135]

Our interpretation will go exactly in the opposite direction. We will state that the Cave is where the *Republic´s* pessimism we are talking about from the beginning becomes more powerful and explicit. First, a quick sketch. At the most elementary interpretative level, the interior of the cave can be read together with the simile of the Sun and the Divided Line[136] as a representation of the ontological structure of reality in its lower dimensions and human cognitive condition in relation to that structure. Beyond the ontological and epistemological

134 *Rep. V*II 539b-c
135 ANNAS, J. (1981), p. 253.
136 *Rep.* VI 507b et seq.

level, the Cave has, however, a social valence that is completely absent in the mentioned similes: the interior of the cave represents the *physis* but it may also refer to the *polis;* thus, the situation of the captives can be assimilated to *doxa* based on *aisthesis* but also to *public opinion* based on *sophistry, art* or, from a wider perspective, *culture*. In both these cases, the final diagnosis is very pessimistic, since it has to do with the idea that, be it by nature, be it by culture, the original condition of the human soul regarding knowledge and the knowable is one of separation and distance. The fact that the prisoners are chained makes this distance not one that can be overcome easily, but a distance that is difficult to transpose. This, we take it, is a way of putting into poetic words the philosophical thesis, defended in many instances throughout the dialogue, about the enormous stupefying, alienating and numbing power of opinion over human mind. The message strengthens when the way in which one of the prisoners leaves the cavern is related: the captive does not free him-self, but is released by a third party. The use of the passive voice and the vocabulary of coercion turns the process into a paradox: the "paradox of the compulsory emancipation". The image of a compulsory emancipation is, putting it short, an expression of the idea that human intelligence is not only prone to alienation by the effect of outside inputs but that it is *in itself* passive, lethargic and (given that the released prisoner wants to return to his place among the other captives) even reactionary. This lack of initiative and this tendency to remain as it is will be reinforced towards the end of the allegory: after being released and having contemplated the outside world, the return to the cave is not a spontaneous act. In fact, the language of coercion, even if nuanced, reappears here. This, we take it, is much more than a claim regarding the incompatibility of philosophical and political life or about the undesirable upshot that not even the philosopher´s freedom and happiness are complete in the *Kallipolis*; it is a claim about the natural condition of the soul´s superior power, namely, reason.

And there is another paradox in the Cave, which we will call the "paradox of the first philosopher". Reading the passage, again, under the concepts introduced in the simile of the Sun and the Divided Line, it can be stated that the outside world represents the ontological structure of reality in its highest dimensions and the cognitive state of human soul in relation to that domain, that is: it represents the intelligible domain, the world of ideas, and scientific and dialectic knowledge related to it. The force that liberates the captive and conduces him to the external world must, necessarily, know *in advance* that higher levels of experience and of knowledge can be reached. But then: supposing that this force is a person – an already enlightened person, a philosopher, the "guide – unless he was born outside the subterranean habitation (and this is a hypothesis for which there is no evidence throughout the construction of the Cave) he must have, for his part, been liberated too. So the question here is not only *who*

is that one who liberates the prisoner, and whose existence cannot be explained with the internal resources provided by the allegory itself, but *how* had he reached superior knowledge. In other words: who liberated the liberator? Regression to infinity is the basis of the paradox of the first philosopher.

There is ground for pessimism at another crucial moment that, as we shall see immediately, can be taken as the end of the allegory: when Socrates suggests that, if the freed man went back to the cave to liberate the prisoners, they, unable to understand what he is saying, would call him crazy and, if they could, they would kill him. This can be interpreted as another message about the cognitive condition of the human soul in the line developed up to now: the soul is not only distant from true knowledge and prone to remain, passive, in the realm opinion or wrong opinion, but it is also violently refractory to to knowledge when, for some exceptional reason, it appears before it.

Let us, now, reconstruct the passage and go through its exegesis slowly. In 1986, J. Harman published an article entitled "Plato´s *Republic* as Tragedy". In the line of his idea, we will suggest here something more specific: that the Allegory of the cave can be read as a tragedy and that its dramatic reconstruction under this premise is faithful to the text[137]. In fact, there are several elements that support the dramatic reconstruction: the allegory develops a single and complete action, consisting of a beginning (first act), a middle (second act) and an end (third act and epilogue), characters can be clearly identified, as well as two turning points, a climax and an anticlimax. Pity and fear – which are two tragic emotions *par excellence*[138] – appear in the Cave from the beginning: pity, as long as the situation of the dwellers of the underground is lamentable (since they are deprived of freedom); fear, since their condition is said to be also "ours". We will undertake this dramatic reconstruction not only because it is possible and faithful to the text, but also, and mainly, because it is useful to explain the pessimistic content that we are trying to highlight here.

At the beginning of the construction[139], Socrates announces, in a kind of quick prologue, that he will describe human situation in relation to education (παιδείας) and its lack (ἀπαιδευσίας), through the articulation of a representative imaginary scenario that is similar to it[140]. First act: there is a cave deep under the earth, connected to the surface by a long, steep and

137 I thank Professor Thomas Robinson for the help in the dramatic reconstruction of the Allegory.
138 ARISTOTLE, *Poetics* where?!
139 *Rep.* VII 514a
140 The inclusion of the prologue as a "prior explanation" is, according to Nietzsche – for whom Socrates is the "father of Western optimism" – a rationalist aggregation of a typically Socratic nature to the primitive structure of tragedy (whose paradigms are Aeschylus and Sophocles) that impoverished the traditional tragic composition and experience and was yet another symptom of the general decline of Greek culture which, according to him, was

narrow corridor. Inside, there is a group of people "prevented by chains from turning round their heads", with their "legs and necks chained so that they cannot move and can only see before them". Evidently, they are prisoners. Socrates says that they have been in the underground since childhood (ἐκ παίδων) and that they are able to look forward only, their gaze fixed ahead. A perverse engineering raises a bizarre spectacle on the backs of the captives: there is a wall – a partition similar to that above which exhibitors of puppet-shows (τοῖς θαυματοποιοῖς) show the puppets (τὰ θαύματα) – and, beyond it, a fire and a space through which a strange procession of men carrying various objects and figures - "implements of all kinds that rise above the wall, human images and shapes of animals as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material" - circulates. The final dynamic is like that of a Chinese shadow theater: the shinning of the bonfire illuminates the figures carried by the men in the procession, whose shadow is projected in the wall that the prisoners have ahead of them. Incapable to turn around, the captives see only the shadows and hear the echo of the voices of those who carry the figures, believing that what they hear comes from the shadows and that the shadows as such are "true" or the truth (τὸ ἀληθὲς). Were the captives able to engage in dialogue, Socrates says, they would repeat the names they hear, rendering "honours (…) and prizes for the man who is quickest to make out the shadows as they pass". When the portrait is finished, Glaucon reacts: "A strange image you speak of", he says, "and strange prisoners". "They are like us", Socrates answers. At this point, an unexpected change in action takes place. Socrates invites his interlocutors to imagine what would happen if one of the prisoners was released and driven outside the underground. This is the first turning point of the plot and the beginning of the second act.

Second act: one of the prisoners is freed (λυθείη) from the chains and compelled (ἀναγκάζοιτο) by someone (τις) to stand up and look around; in doing so, he feels pain (ἀλγοῖ) in his eyes. In these circumstances, he is presented the marionettes whose shadows he used to see in the wall before him and forced, by means of questions (ἀναγκάζοι ἐρωτῶν[141]), to call each of them by their name. The freedman, however, is confused and speechless, and wants to turn away and flee (φεύγειν ἀποστρεφόμενον) to those things which he is able to discern. However, he is not allowed to do so, but he is dragged (ἕλκοι) by force (βίᾳ) up the ascent[142]. When approaching the outside, the freedman suffers because of the brightness and tries to avoid

brought about by Socrates. The prologue of Euripides and the whole phenomenon of the New Attic Comedy have, according to Nietzsche, these connotations. On Nietzsche´s view of Socrates, see ANNEX 1.

141 *Rep.* VII 515b

142 *Rep.*VII 515c-516a

the light; his sight is dazzled, his mind too, and he is unable to understand, much less to give an account of what is happening or to believe he is on the right way. But these are labor pains. When he crosses the entrance, it is night-time. His eyes become gradually accustomed to the new atmosphere in a long and slow process: first, he gets used to the gloom, laying his eyes on the shadows of natural objects to which he is receptive for previous life in the Cave; then he contemplates the water and, on its mirror surface, he becomes able to discern such objects reflected. In the sequence, he is in a position to look at the objects themselves until he is able to turn his sight to the sky, where he sees the moon and the stars. Finally, he observes the outside world in all its splendor and, at dawn, he contemplates everything illuminated by the Sun and the Sun itself. Looking at the sun, the freedman has an insight: he understands that it is what brings to life everything in the outside world and that, in a way, it is the cause of what he and his companions were used to look at in the cave. Thus, he finally attains the emancipation of Darkness. This is the climax of the Cave. At this point, it is already possible to discern a main character of the dramatic composition and his transformation arc: from a prisoner he was, he became a freedman and, from the freedman, an enlightened. Having explored the open space and discovered the source of light, the enlightened remembers the underground, is happy for the change (εὐδαιμονίζω) and feels compassion (ἐλεέω) for his former fellows. In his new lucidity, he realizes how ridiculous their conversations are, how enslaved and deceived they find themselves. At this moment, the enlightened thinks to himself that he would prefer, like Homer's Achilles, to be the servant of a poor man in the new world than to return to the cave[143]. Having reached this point, however, Socrates proposes, again, a new sudden change of events: he now invites his interlocutors to imagine that the freedman is forced or convinced to abdicate his bliss, return to the grotto and free the prisoners. This is the second turning point of the plot and the beginning of the third act.

Third act: the enlightened, even if he is unwilling to return to the cave (οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν), will be forced (προσαναγκάζοντες), or even accept to do so. In this way, the enlightened becomes a redeemer. On his return journey, says Socrates, he suffers similar pains to those of ascension: his vision is overshadowed, now because of the darkness, and he needs a second time of adaptation to get used to the cloister environment again. Arrived there, accustomed at last to the half-lights, the redeemer reports his experience to the captives: he narrates the way out of the Cave and gives news of the luminous world beyond the underground, urging the chained ones to also free themselves and embark as soon as possible on the way out.

143 *Rep.* VII 516c-e

Epilogue: The redeemer will not, however, have a fortune of heroism. When he tries to explain what he has seen, the prisoners think that he has lost his mind and ruined his eyes on the journey, making fun of him and calling him crazy. If, in view of the insufficiency of his method, the redeemer tries to free the prisoners by force and drag them upwards, this would precipitate a terrible outcome: were it possible for the prisoners to use their hands, they would do so, and annihilate the redeemer. Thus, the epilogue of history is also an anticlimax and the transformation arch of the main character becomes complete: from a redeemer he was, he becomes a martyr.

The pessimistic trait of the cave is strong and evident. But it is when we turn to the philosophical background of the allegory that it becomes explicit and, what is an impression born of a poetic construct, acquires power in the arguments. Following Socrates´ advice[144], let us return now to Book VI, where the images of the Sun and the Line concentrate the theory of knowledge that underlies the image of the Cave.

These are the notions of *being*, *non-being* and *becoming*, of *truth* and *illusion*, of *knowledge*, *opinion* and *ignorance*. Having established the fundamental lexicon, Plato weaves a complex network of parallelisms, always maintaining the criterion of light and darkness. Along with the tradition[145], we will say that Sun, Line and Cave constitute a single great metaphor: the metaphor of Light, a fractal of comparisons regarding cognitive states which begins in Book VI, with the individual soul as its center, and is completed in Book VII, with the collective, social and political as the main focus.

After reading Books VI and VII, our observation is that in all spheres: metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, morals and politics, *light* is as fundamental as *darkness*, and that there is, in the central message of the *Republic*, a pessimistic diagnosis that contrasts with the utopian exaltations that recur throughout the work.

The simile of the Sun is introduced, in Book VI, in the context of the discussion about the higher education of guardians. Having been trained and tested in everything related to the body and the temperament, one last stage of the formation process begins: theoretical studies. To the surprise of his interlocutors, Socrates declares that the objects visited by them until then (the idea of justice and the other virtues) do not constitute the most important learning, but that a "longer path"[146] must be taken to really cleanse the soul from ignorance.

144 *Rep.* VII 517a-b.
145 Cf. FERGUSON
146 Cfr. *Rep.* IV, 435d; VI 504b, 504d

The best endowed (those with natural inclination and pleasure in thinking, ability to concentrate, good memory, etc.) who had gone through the previous stages, says Socrates, will be initiated in the "highest disciplines". But at certain moment, Socrates changes from the plural to the singular[147]. This transition is significant: education is not only about a program of linked disciplines, but also about a final and unique objective, to which these disciplines aim. In other words, there is a point of arrival. Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, harmony etc. are only a preamble, a preparation to dialectics and, within the domain of dialectics, to a certain idea that crowns the domain of the knowable. There is *a* maximum object of knowledge, a single idea in relation to which all the rest of the studies is only an introduction: the Idea of the Good is the *mégiston máthema*[148]. The Idea of the Good is above all the rest; in fact, it is in virtue of it that justice and everything else that we consider valuable and desirable is, in fact, valuable and desirable. Socrates says that the Idea of the Good is, also, that which motivates action: it is that "which every soul pursues and for its sake does all that it does"[149]. The excellence of this idea is, therefore, twofold: epistemological and practical.

With such a presentation, the listeners' curiosity is stirred, and Socrates is asked to give an account on the nature of this very superior Idea of Good. Discarding vulgar valuations (that Good is pleasure, that Good is knowledge) and admitting that there is a difficult and controversial issue at hand, he tries to evade the issue. We will come back to this step latter. For now, let us just say that Glaucon insists, gives up conclusive expectations and declares himself satisfied if Socrates talks about the Good in the way he had talked in relation to justice and the other concepts explored so far. Being so, Socrates invites his companions to accept a metaphorical explanation of the Good or, if they are not content with that, to abandon the subject. The interlocutors accept the illustrative comparison and urge Socrates to go ahead. He begins returning to the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, introduced in Book V[150]. Vision captures the multiple (many beautiful things, for example); reason, language postulates each multiplicity as a particular and "invisible" unit (the "Beautiful itself", the "Idea of the Beautiful") so that "multiple things can be seen, but not thought; while ideas can be thought, but not seen"[151]. Both, things and ideas are, in a loose sense, knowable – but they are known in different ways; of both we say that they exist, but the idea we say that it is *what* exists.

147 Τὰ μέγιστα μαθήματα in 503e; 504a, but μέγιστον μάθημα in 504e et seq., ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα μέγιστον μάθημα in 505a, etc.
148 Ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα μέγιστον μάθημα (*Rep.* VI 505a)
149 *Rep.* VI 505e
150 Cf. *Rep.* V 476a et seq.
151 *Rep.* VI 507b

With this, Plato is placing an ontological valuation: with respect to being there is, between the sensible and the intelligible, at the same time a similarity and a difference, a proximity and a contrast and, in particular, a preeminence of the latter over the former.

Having stated this, Socrates explores the proximity between seeing and understanding in order to build his comparison. He focuses first on the sensitive realm, choosing the sense of sight: the eye has the power of vision and vision, as a *dunamis*, has a proper object of its own. But unlike other senses that function with a direct contact of the respective organ with the respective object, for sight to occur it is necessary that between the eye that can see and that which can be seen there is a “third element”, a mediator, that comes as if to "activate" the latent power. Such a bond is, of course, light. In the absence of light, neither the eye sees, nor things are seen; in its presence, the organ fulfills its *érgon* and, thus, the sensitive representation is formed.

In this context, sight and the visible are selected among the senses as the closest analogue to intelligence, precisely because of the relationship they have with the “third element” at stake, light. The Sun enters the scene at this moment as the "source" of light, "the god" who dispenses light "as a kind of magic fluid" that makes the eye see on the one hand and, on the other, things to be seen. Immediately, the Sun is still awarded another power: as the fountain of light, it is the fountain of life, the cause of the genesis of beings and of all natural cycles. The Sun is, thus, placed at the center of the great metaphor of Light. A crucial distinction follows: Socrates points out that, although neither sight nor the eye are the Sun, both have a special affinity with it, they are "solar", *helioeidé*. In addition to "depending" on the Sun in the ways mentioned above, the Sun itself is seen by the eye and, more importantly, recognized as a cause, *aitia*. In this way we arrive at the first formulation of parallelism that will give an account of the essence of Good. Socrates says that the Idea of the Good is, in the intelligible universe, to intelligence and intelligible objects, what the Sun is, in the visible universe, to vision and visible objects[152]. But he goes ahead and states that the Good is in the intelligible domain what the Sun is in the visible domain insofar it “gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower (...) and you must conceive it as being the cause (*aitia*) of knowledge, and of truth in so far as known”[153]. Moving loosely in the metaphorical context, he deepens the already dense parallelism:

152 *Rep.* VI, 508b-c
153 *Rep.* VI 508d

> "The sun (...) not only furnishes to visibles the power of visibility but it also provides for their generation and growth and nurture though it is not itself generation (…) In like manner, then, you are to say that the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power."[154]

Glaucon reacts to this enthusiastic exaltation of Good. What does this causal role and this positioning of the Good beyond essence mean? What does the condition ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας mean? Is Socrates suggesting some kind of exteriority of the Good regarding the intelligible? According to Ferguson, the main purpose of the entire simile is to illustrate the way in which the Good can be conceived as transcendent: "the transcendence of the Good is the point of the analogy", he says[155]. However, the Good cannot be completely transcendent because, if it were, it could not be an object of knowledge, much less the maximum. For Socrates' position to make sense, the superiority of the Good must not imply a radical alterity/otherness. Socrates statement must, then, imply something less radical. When he establishes the parallel between the visible world, crowned by the Sun, and the intelligible, crowned by the Good, he is, as we pointed out above, at the same time to likening and differentiating not only two classes of objects of knowledge, but also two whole *kinds* of knowledge. As it will be gradually clarified, when the soul turns towards what becomes and perishes, namely, the sensible, it itself becomes as fickle as the objects it perceives and has an *opinion*; in contrast, when it turns towards intelligible objects, namely, Ideas, which are always identical to themselves, it has *intelligence*[156]. But this is not the only distinction when it comes to knowledge. Intelligence is superior to opinion but, because of its reflective nature, it is itself internally complex, which is to say that there are different, objects of intelligence, interrelated and subordinate among themselves. Socrates' suggestion, then, could mean that the Good is at the top of the *eidetic* order; it is an idea, but one of infinite superior value, the "idea of ideas", a more remote object even than existence or essence. Essence, existence, justice, beauty and, in general, all the important Forms mentioned in the rest of the dialogue, share the same nature and remain within a single order, with none being removed from the set; the Good, however, is a very special object: being knowable (as its condition of *megistón mathemata* demands) it is, at the same time, "almost unknowable", positioned in the extreme limit, the apex of the

154 *Rep*. VI 509b
155 FERGUSON, Op. Cit. p. 136.
156 *Rep.* VI 509d

intelligible domain in a condition of "almost transcendency" (thus fulfilling the condition *epekeina tés ousías*). So the thought here is that Plato is portraying an epistemological fact of remarkable relevance: the Good, the maximum object of knowledge, borders the unknowable or the inexpressable – at least in the context of the path that has been transited, that is, the path of dialectics (and of the written word). With this, we reach a point of major importance to our argument: the *logos* has enormous difficulties in understanding the idea of the Good. What is more: Plato seems to believe that, in a certain way, the very idea of the Good withdraws, as long as it is by definition presented as something that lays beyond essence. This "withdrawal of the Good" is probably the reason why Socrates wants to avoid the task of describing it and the reason why Glaucon reacts to his metaphorical account. "An inconceivable beauty you speak of, if it is the source of knowledge and truth, and yet itself surpasses them in beauty"[157] , he says, first; and then: "Heaven save us, hyperbole can no further go"[158]. We shall come back to Glaucon´s interventions.

Let us now come back to the nature of knowledge and the hierarchy within the intelligible domain. In the same context of the meditation regarding higher education, Socrates returns to the distinctions made: there is the realm of the visible and the realm of the intelligible; in the first, the Sun governs, in the second, the idea of Good. To clarify the point, he invites his interlocutors to imagine a line divided into two unequal parts that are subdivided, in turn, and according to the same proportion, into two parts each. Everything points to establishing a hierarchical ordering. In fact, the language used here suggests to an "up" and a "down"[159], for which the line must be represented vertically which, by the way, will be helpful when returning to the Allegory of the cave with the arsenal of concepts developed here in trying to explain it.

The first division of the Line, the "great division", as we will call it, portrays the elementary distinction: the largest section, which is located below, represents the domain of the visible; the smallest, which is located above, that of the intelligible. Socrates then proceeds to organize the entities within the visible universe according to their "clarity" and "obscurity", "truth" and "untruth". Thus, he applies the same ratio of the great division and distinguishes: the visible world, at the lower part of the line, is constituted, bottom up, by "shadows and simulations formed on the surface of water and smooth and opaque objects"[160] (*eikones*, *skias*, *phantasmata*) and, then, by the natural and artificial objects that produce such shadows and

157 *Rep.* VI 509a
158 Καὶ ὁ Γλαύκων μάλα γελοίως, Ἄπολλον, ἔφη, δαιμονίας ὑπερβολῆς. *Rep.* VI 509c
159 Cf. for instance 511a
160 *Rep.* VI 510a

reflexes. In short: natural and artificial entities are (metaphysically) "superior" to the shadows they produce, and the "knowledge" of the objects their-selves is (epistemologically) superior to that of their shadows[161]. A similar distinction is reproduced in the higher section of the line, that is, in the intelligible domain. There are, in the intelligible world, two degrees, two "levels" of knowledge: the most basic form of intellectual knowledge is located, bottom up, in the first section of the intelligible domain, in which the soul starts from hypotheses and uses "images" extracted from the objects of the previous section – from the "lower world" (ἀνωτέρω), that is, the world of beings and objects – and elaborates, based on them, its conclusions. We are at a crucial point here: the intersection between the so-called "two worlds"; it is the unclear limit at which the abyss that separates both opens. Visible and intelligible overlap here; the *logos* is in a way mixed with *aisthesis*, uses it as a starting point or base[162]. In addition to sensible representation, but still in close connection to it, we have the concept, which is given to intelligence in virtue of the work of understanding, *dianoia*. And the way up continues. In the second section of the intelligible, and also starting from hypotheses, but now without making use of images from the sensible world, the soul moves freely in his own sphere, that is: it moves from thought to thought, from "ideas to ideas", to reach not a conclusion, but a principle not assumed. This is, strictly speaking, the domain of knowledge, *episteme.*

In Book V Socrates had established that *doxa* occupied an intermediate place between knowledge, *gnosis*, and ignorance, *agnoia*; now, he stipulates that understanding, *dianoia*, is, on its turn, "something in between reason and opinion"[163], something that is located between knowledge, *episteme*, and opinion, *doxa*. The lower section of the great division, thus, corresponds to *doxa.* Thus, we have a clear order: ignorance, opinion, understanding, knowledge: *agnoia*, *doxa*, *dianoia*, *episteme*; being that "what is seen through knowledge and dialectics, in the world of being and intelligibility, is clearer than that achieved with the help of the so-called arts and sciences"[164].

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161 Cfr. *Rep.* X, 596d-e: "if you should choose to take a mirror and carry it about everywhere. You will speedily produce the sun and all the things in the sky, and speedily the earth and yourself and the other animals and implements and plants and all the objects of which we just now spoke". The ontological status of the projections in the Cave is weaker; following the imagery of Book X, it could be figured as pointing a mirror at art products. Also: even if there is an ontological equivalence between shadows and reflections in mirrors (they are both εἰκόνες), there seems to simultaneously be an advantage of reflections over shadows: cf. *Rep.* VII, 516a, where the released discerns better the Idea through shadows than through reflections in mirror-like surfaces, and also: "By images I mean, *first*, shadows, and *then* reflections in water and on surfaces of dense, smooth and bright texture" (*Rep.* VI 509e-510a).
162 *Rep.* VI 511b
163 *Rep.* VI 511d
164 *Rep.* VI 511c.

To close Book VI, Plato advances one last ordering: for each of the four sections of the line, there corresponds a specific psychic phenomenon: top to bottom intelligence, here in the form of *noesis*, for the highest (ἀνωτάτω), that is, for the one in which the *logos* moves from ideas to ideas and discursive understanding or thought; *dianoia,* for the one in which the soul has as its starting point concepts still related to the sensible domain; conviction, *pistis*, for the "knowledge" of visible object and conjecture, *eikasía,* for the knowledge of their shadows and reflexes[165]. This last distinction is very important for us. Socrates had distinguished visible objects in two classes: the natural and artificial entities, on the one hand, and the shadows and visual effects caused by them – as a whole called *eikone* –, on the other. *Pistis* is the name now given to the cognition of visible objects and *eikasía* to their shadows and reflections. At the end of Book VI, Plato suggests that conviction and conjecture are located at the darkest extremity, at the bottom of the Line. This is, evidently, a key to understand the events of the Cave and the condition of the captives.

But the construction of the Line does not end in Book VI. The image is taken up in Book VII[166], precisely after the entire formulation of the Cave. Having placed the contrast between dream and vigil, but on this occasion referring to the relationship between the understanding proper of the sciences, and that of the dialectics, Socrates locates understanding *between* knowledge and opinion. The novelty, therefore, which was implicit in Book VI, becomes explicit here: *pistis* and *eikasía* constitute the broader domain of *doxa*. Thus, we have the following final ordering: the highest segment of the Divided Line, located closest to the source of clarity, that is, of truth, existence and essence – which, from the simile of the Sun and as Socrates himself will make explicit immediately, we know that corresponds to the Idea of Good – corresponds to science (*episteme*); the following, two steps away from clarity, corresponds to discursive understanding or thinking (*dianoia*); the third, already on the other side of the "great division" that separates visible from intelligible, three steps away from the origin, is the segment of the faith (*pistis*) and, finally, in the most distant level of the glare, the fourth and last step, corresponding to conjecture (*eikasía*).

With the vocabulary thus consolidated, Socrates establishes some final conclusions that put in relation epistemology and metaphysics: opinion refers to becoming; intelligence, to Being. This formulation confirms the superiority of intelligence and its relation to Being but also, and simultaneously, the inferiority of opinion and its relation to the sensible. It is interesting to highlight that Socrates cares to call attention to the fact that absolute ignorance is

165 *Rep.* VI 511d-e.
166 *Rep.* VII 533e et seq.

impossible: the realm of absolute non-being does not exists, and there is no possible knowledge about it. Something similar happens here, although inverted, to what happens with absolute luminosity, which is unfathomable, as has been established in the simile of the Sun and the almost-transcendence of the Idea of the Good; both, absolute being and absolute not-being, are alien to the soul´s *dunameis* related to knowledge.

We are now in a good position to return to the construction of the Cave. In Book VII, Plato indicates how we should proceed to relate the concepts hitherto visited in relation to the memorable image:

> "This image then (...) we must apply as a whole to all that has been said, likening the region revealed through sight to the habitation of the prison, and the light of the fire in it to the power of the sun. And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear. *But God knows whether it is true. But, at any rate, my dream as it appears to me is that* in the region of the known *the last thing to be seen and hardly seen* is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this."[167]

In view of these indications, we can conclude that the symbolism of the Allegory of the cave is constructed in order to mirror, on the one hand, the ontological and metaphysical ordering of reality as *physis* and, in parallel, the cognitive state and the cognitive possibilities of human soul in relation to it. In a first and basic hermeneutic effort, we can assimilate the interior of the Cave to the realm of the sensible, the place of multiplicity and eternal change between being and not-being**,** and to the psychic state of opinion; we can assimilate, also, the exterior to the intelligible domain and to the psychic state of knowledge, and conclude that the cave is a pessimistic "diagnosis" not only regarding the ontological status of the reality in the midst of which human soul comes to be, but also of the original psychical condition of human soul from the point of view of its cognitive powers. As we shall see in the next chapter, some important figures such as Vlastos react against this reading and make a great effort to defend that this is not a pessimistic diagnosis, especially in what has to do with the ontological status of reality. However, it is hard to deny (and not even Vlastos is successful in this attempt), that

167 *Rep.* VII 517 a-b.

the "diagnosis" is a pessimistic one: if we read the Cave with the Lower line in mind, it is practically inevitable to assume that what Plato is trying to say is that, although it does not completely coincide with ignorance (since absolute ignorance is, as we have seen, impossible), the original condition of the soul´s cognitive capacities is adverse to knowledge and education and, for this reason, tragic and pitiable. When comparing the Sun to the radiance of the fire that burns inside the cave, Plato performs a remarkable inversion: at the heart of the comparison there is not only an assimilation, a similarity between the Sun and the fire, but also – and fundamentally – a *contrast* and, on the whole, a *powerful slide from the emphasis on Light to an emphasis on Darkness*[168]. From the point of view of its cognitive functions, the soul is originally subjected to darkness, that is, to the world of *aisthesis* and of the *doxa* attached to it. What is more: the prisoners can only look at shadows, and, being so, we could well think that they are subjected not only to opinion, *but to the lower form of opinion*: not even *pistis* is possible for them, but only *eikasía,* since they can only look at *eikone*[169]. This may be the reason why Socrates cares, after all, to distinguish the species of *doxa* after the whole construction of the Cave.

In short, then, the condition of the prisoners in the Cave aims to illustrate how far from truth and knowledge *we* are, both in the sense of the experience *we* have of the world and on the thoughts and conversations *we* have about that experience. In fact, immediately after Socrates has portrayed the condition of the prisoners, Glaucon says: "A strange image you speak of (…) and strange prisoners", and Socrates answers: "They are like us"[170]. The most

168 There are numerous difficulties here. For example, Plato does not offer any element that may correspond to the fire inside the cave in the introductory similes of the Sun and the Line. The Sun in the outside world is equivalent to the Idea of Good, however, Plato says in the above quote that the bonfire is equivalent to the Sun! Strictly speaking, there is no element to which we can refer to discover the meaning of the mediated or artificial light of the bonfire. Artificial light is an unprecedented element, for whose interpretation a dangerous distance from the text is necessary.

169 However, there are many problems here. When the freedman looks at the Sun outside the cave, necessity pushes him to exercise initially at night and to place his gaze *on the shadows and reflections produced by the different objects*. What other epithet could we adjudicate to this cognitive stage than, precisely, that of *eikasía*? And then, when he discovers the "real" objects outside the cave – what epistemological level is he on, if not that of *pistis*? This difficulty seems to undermine the previous exegesis, and to pull the entire composition of the line as an interpretive key to the events that take place *outside* the Cave. *Pistis* and *eikasía* both take place outside the Cave. If, despite this and motivated by the desire not to impoverish the symbolism of the Cave, we still insist on affirming that the lowest form of *doxa* is what defines the *pathos* of the soul inside the cave, then we should review the notion of *doxa.* In this context, it is useful to evoke the concept of *alethés doxa*. The correct opinion is to some extent valued by Plato: it is, for example, what allows non-philosophers to participate in "virtue", that they do not generate *stasis* within the polis, etc. There is therefore, at least in certain contexts, a positive assessment of the opinion, namely: opinion is good when it is true. True opinion is only possible outside the Cave. In view of difficulties of this kind, we could suspend the impulse to exhaust the parallelism until its last consequences, stating only that the situation inside the cave symbolizes the universe of false opinion, located far away from the truth arise by sensible experience. Cf. FERGUSON (1921), pp. 145 et seq.

170 *Rep.* VII 515a.

immediate thought here is that Socrates is presenting a vision about human condition in general. To exist in this world means, from the beginning – and we should remember that the prisoners have been in the cave "from childhood" – to be anchored in a coercive ignorance, whose main and powerful original source are the senses and the *physis,* as well as the deficient use of intelligence that they elicit. It is not only about ignorance, but about the worst possible kind of ignorance. This vision, obviously, is far from being the product of an optimistic disposition. The emphasis, as we said, is not on Light, but on the contrast with Darkness.

Going ahead in the hermeneutic effort, we can reach an interpretation that transcends the world of the given in a merely "natural" sense. If the Cave represents the great domain of the *physis* – what is the meaning of the wall and the rest of the elements that surround the captives? The prisoners, says Socrates, "have been there since childhood"; but we don't know if they were born there. We know nothing, in fact, about how they got there. The fact is that they did not light the fire, did not build the wall and, in general, they are absolutely unaware of what is happening around them. From this point of view, there is nothing "natural" inside the cave. The environment around the prisoners is entirely artificial, carefully planned, and evidently set up "before" the narrative begins. In view of this, we are led to think that what takes place inside the cave is the product of other men's work and that the interior of the Cave represents something more than mere *physis*. In fact, everything looks like a stage, a set design. Socrates himself compares the wall interposed between the procession and the prisoners to the "partition that the puppeteers raise between themselves and the public to show their dolls". The reference to puppeteers and their "wonders" also occurs in the Laws. There, the idea appears in the context of reflection on the soul: the soul is the puppet, the gods the puppeteers[171]; in the context of the *Republic*, however, the "artist" is not known, being the emphasis on "the staging" itself. If what happens inside the cave is a spectacle, the underground space would be something like a theater and the prisoners a strange kind of audience. This projects us back to Book V, where Socrates distinguishes the philosopher, lover of wisdom and learning, φιλομαθής, from the "lover of opinion", φιλόδοξος, whom he also calls in this context "lover of sights" or of "spectacles", φιλοθεάμων[172]. This double adjectivation perfectly describes the circumstance of the prisoner of the Cave which, as we have seen, is the place of something like a shadow theater; that is: it is the place of a spectacle.

In Book X Socrates will say, regarding imitative poetry, that it "corrupts (λώβη?) [the soul and] the clear understanding of the listeners, unless they have the proper antidote: the

171 *Laws* 644d et seq.
172 *Rep.,* V 475b e ss.

knowledge of the true nature" of what is represented[173]. The poet, like any other craftsmen, does not imitate what is *as it is*, but what appears *as it appears*, and is "the third counting from the king". The painter who paints a bed, for example, is "three degrees away from the truth"[174]: the idea of the bed is first, the physical bed is second, the painted bed is third. Inside the Cave, the situation is worse. The prisoners do not see the "figures" carried by the men in the procession, but their shadows; they not only confuse the copy of the copy with the original, but the copy of the copy of the copy with the original. In the Cave, we are *four* degrees away from the truth. This, again, reinforces the pessimistic diagnosis.

As an audience, the captives of the Cave are as peculiar as the spectacle they witness. The peculiarity lies in the fact that, despite the slavery in which they find themselves, they seem to be free from suffering, indifferent to the weight of the chains and to the coercion they are subjected to; quite on the contrary, they even seem to be having fun. Taking the specters for truth, they repeat the names they hear echoing in the depths of the cave and compete with each other, celebrating, with enthusiasm, those who demonstrate greater skill in guessing the order and predicting sequence of the shadows. We cannot help thinking that, if they could, the prisoners in the Cave would applaud the winners of the contest, and the cave walls would echo their applause, as it echoes the voices of the carriers. And we cannot help, either, remembering also that passage in Book VI, where Socrates says:

> "when (…) the multitude are seated together in assemblies or in court-rooms or theaters or camps or any other public gathering of a crowd, and with loud uproar censure some of the things that are said and done and approve others, both in excess, with full-throated clamor and clapping of hands, and thereto the rocks and the region round about re-echoing redouble the din of the censure and the praise"[175]

The prisoners of the Cave evoke the crowd in the city; their behavior, thus, can be conceived as a representation of the genesis of public opinion. Whether due to the natural influx of *physis* and *aisthesis*, whether due to the "artificial" effects of art, sophistry or politics, the fact is that there is a social aspect in the construction of the allegory of the Cave. In stating this, we are moving beyond Socrates´ recommendation, which is to bring the statements of the Divided Line and the simile of the Sun to understand the Cave. However, the narrative of the construction itself gives occasion for such a thing. In the Cave, the prisoners begin their lives

173 *Rep.* X 595b et seq.
174 *Rep.* X 599a
175 *Rep*. VI 492b-c

neither in nature´s heart nor in isolation, but *among their pairs and in an environment in which human intervention is crucial*. We already know (for the Line and the Sun) how the world is constituted and how cognition takes place *in the abstract*: we have a hypothesis regarding the ontological structure of reality and, mainly, of the soul´s nature and potentialities; however, by virtue of the characteristics of the scene, we are led to consider how reason manifests *in concrete*: in concrete – Socrates suggests – intelligence comes to be in a "collective", "cultural" environment. The Cave can be read, then, as a metaphor about human nature and its condition, *which is collective and social*. "The Cave is not just the degraded state of a bad society. It is the human condition", Anna says[176], and we reformulate: the Cave is about human condition, which is, *in concrete*, to come to be and develop in the midst of (a bad) society. This is what Wilberding calls the "more or less orthodox" interpretation of the allegory, namely: "that the prisoners represent (...) the majority of men in the *polis*, whose mental state should be characterized as unreflected belief"[177]. Being so, the above conclusion strengthens the idea that human soul comes to be in a world that is, in a very important way, averse to its development and plenitude, both from point of view of the individual and of the collective.

And there are further reasons for pessimism in the Cave. Since the task of tracing all the possible meanings for each step of the construction is a Herculean task, especially in a context such as the present, we will now focus on certain aspects that are useful to our aim. Let us pay attention, first, to the liberation of one of the prisoners and the process that leads him out of the cave returning to the proposal of the dramatic reconstruction, since it becomes especially useful in this case.

The prisoners are in the underground from childhood. They amuse themselves, pathetically enjoying their condition as time passes by as if it were an eternal night of fun and leisure. Ignorant of their ignorance, they are fully satisfied with the life they lead; they are comfortable with their shared opinion and show no signs of displeasure, let alone of subversion. The shadow procession, indeed, never stops, and at no time is it indicated that the staging will have another destiny than to perpetuate itself for ever. The transformation of one of the prisoners into a freedman, in fact, is introduced by Socrates in a completely unexpected way, as if it was a *deus ex machina*. The *deus ex machina* was a technique or a device used in ancient theater in which a new, completely external character or event *that does not arise from the internal logic of the plot* was introduced to the scene to change the course of action. Actors were brought onto the stage using a machine, usually a crane, to lower them from above. The

176 ANNAS (1981), p. 252.
177 Quoted in BARNEY (2008), p. 6.

artifice is extremely suggestive to describe what happens in the first turning point of the Cave´s plot: nothing in the first act, that is: nothing that happens inside the cave – none of the shadow show's avatars, nor any impulse arising from the prisoners themselves – explains the liberation of the prisoner and the exit from the cave. As we have seen, this exogenous, inexplicable agent, does not manifest as a gentle, benevolent force, but as a violent interference that puts an end to the thitherto comfortable state of the prisoner. The prisoner is "forced to get up, to turn his neck, to walk and look at the light", while he is "dragged" out "by force [along] the rough and abrupt slope"; on the way, he is "coerced into looking at puppets"[178], and so on. The vocabulary of coercion, violence and suffering is manifest from this point and until the end of the construction, as well as the careful use of the passive voice of, for example, the verb "to set free"[179]. The message is clear enough: there is no movement of self-will in the prisoner's liberation. The captive is not an active agent of the emancipation, he *is released* and *impelled* by a third, mysterious agent.

Two things are important to us in relation to this passage and the way it takes place. First, there is an issue regarding the cognitive power of the soul. In virtue of the liberation, which evidently refers to the educational process and the passage from *doxa* to *episteme*, the freedman will become an enlightened, to then assume a social role and return to the cave to try to free his former companions. However, *as a freedman*, he does not seem to be the possessor of one of those souls that Socrates considers "the few best", which are the only who can reach the highest levels of knowledge. The best souls, says Socrates, aspire from an early age for the truth and are willing to learn[180]. This is evidently not the case of the liberated prisoner of the Cave. He must, then, be a member of "the majority", which is consistent with the way in which the prisoners have appeared to us so far. And Socrates says:

> "one can see in children, that they are from their very birth chock-full of rage and high spirit, but as for reason, some of them, to my thinking, never participate in it, and the majority quite late." [181]

178 *Rep.,*VII 515c-516a, 515d; 515e, etc.
179 λυθείη καὶ ἀναγκάζοιτο (*Rep.* VII 515c) - "released and forced, compelled, obliged". And Cf. Also: ἕλκοι τις αὐτὸν βίᾳ διὰ (*Rep* VII 515e) - "dragged by force"; ελκύσει of ἑλκέω (Rep. VII 515e) - "drag, be dragged"; ἀναγκάζοι [...] ἀποκρίνεσθαι – (*Rep.* VII 515d) "forced, compelled, obliged to respond"; ἀναγκάζοι [...] βλέπειν (*Rep.* VII, 515e) "forced, compelled / to look"; ἀναγκαζόμενος (*Rep.* VII 515e); ἀναγκάσαι ... πρὸς τὸ μάθημα [πρὸς τὸ] ἰδεῖν τὸ ἀγαθὸν (*Rep*. VII 519b)"Compel the study and towards the idea of good"; μὴ ἐπιτρέπειν (*Rep.* VII 519d) - ἐπιτρέπω: "do not trust / give to freedom to / allow", πειθοῖ τε καὶ ἀνάγκῃ (*Rep.* VII 519d) "by persuasion or by force"; προσαναγκάζοντες τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιμελεῖσθαί τε καὶ φυλάττειν (*Rep*, VII 519d) - "forced to take care of others"; ἐπ᾽ἀναγκαῖον αὐτῶν ἕκαστος εἶσι τὸ ἄρχειν (*Rep.* VII 520e) - "each of them is forced to govern", etc.
180 *Rep.* VI 485a et seq.
181 *Rep.* IV 441a-b

How come, then, that the freedman becomes an enlightened? Whatever the answer to this question may be, the fact is that the captive, who is a common man, does not break the chains for his own will and, if it depended only on him, he would stay forever in the underground, contesting with his fellows about the shadows they see on stage and which they ingenuously take for reality and dogmatically defend as truth. The seriousness of the fact that the prisoner leaves the penumbra *only if pushed by another* should not be diminished. The image suggests the idea that the more or less general human cognitive capacities display a natural lethargy: a very weak impulse towards thinking and truth and, what is more: a tendency to reject any external force (education) that may guide it towards an active state of positive approximation to knowledge. Giving up opinions and, worse, shared opinions, is, as it is clear in most instances in which Socrates applies the *elenchus*, something that triggers a strong resistance and, on the whole, a difficult and painful process, which tends to be sterile in most cases. This is one possible interpretation of the fact that the prisoner wishes to return to the place where he was, when he is liberated. Being so, the thought here is that Plato is suggesting that the soul is refractory, by nature, culture or both, in the first place to embarking spontaneously on the path of study and, in the second, to being guided by a third party towards it. The paradoxical idea of a compulsory emancipation is an additional and very important ground for pessimism regarding the possibilities of human soul´s development. In fact, Socrates himself recognizes that, when he says:

> "All this study (…) must be presented to them while still young, not in the form of compulsory instruction (…) Because a free soul ought not to pursue any study slavishly; for while bodily labors performed under constraint do not harm the body, nothing that is learned under compulsion stays with the mind" *(Rep.* VII 536d-e)

As Barney puts it, in the Cave "the result is a paradox if not a downright contradiction. How can the ascent to the Forms be compelled, if nothing learned by compulsion will stick?"[182]. The thought here is that Plato knows, and wants the reader to know also, that the philosophical life, attractive and paradigmatical as it may be, is full of contradictions. Putting it short, in this case the idea is that *rational progress is neither spontaneous nor autonomous*. With this, the possibility of achieving the wisdom necessary to psychic harmony, which depends to a great extent on cognitive development, becomes highly unlikely. In fact, the very existence

182 BARNEY, p. 5.

of the wise philosopher becomes highly unlikely and, with it, the *Kallipolis* becomes highly unlikely too.

Second, this unlikeness seems to be in perfect harmony with the device of the *deus ex machina.* This device poses the "the problem of the first philosopher"[183]: the machinery of the Cave image requires a liberator and that leaves open the question of who liberated the liberator. There is no satisfactory answer to this question, and we have nothing better to suggest than it is an issue of *theia moira*[184]. In the Seventh Letter (supposing it is legitimate), Plato says:

> "I had once been full of enthusiasm for public service. Now when I concentrated on the political scene and observed its general chaos I ended feeling dizzy. I continued to look for a way of improving these particular situations and the general political system, waiting on the right moment to action, till in the end I came to realize that every single state suffers from bad government. Their political systems would require *a combination of miraculous organization and good luck to rescue them*."[185]

This, however, does not seem to be strong enough a foundation to nurture the hope in an eventual realization of the *Kallipolis*. And there is still one thing that deserves to be pointed out. It has to do with the quick, but nonetheless extremely important remark made by Glaucon during Socrates´ construction of the simile of the Sun in Book VI, which acquires a particular signification in the Cave´s context and also for us here. In Book VI, Socrates was asked to give an account of the Idea of the Good. Having left aside the alternatives that the Good is pleasure or knowledge, he tries to evade the issue by claiming that it is not appropriate to speak "as if you know something you don't know"[186]. Glaucon insists, but Socrates goes back for a second time, claiming that he fears that such a talking may be "beyond his possibilities"[187]: he fears to be "swept away by enthusiasm" and refuses to "do the ridiculous"[188]. But Glaucon is not satisfied, and insists, a second time. Having his repeated attempt to avoid the task failed once and again, Socrates begins, even if evidently against his will, to construct an account of

183 I thank Professor Chris Bobonich for the useful dialogue that allowed the elaboration of this idea.
184 Cf. *Rep.* VI 492a, 499b, IX 592a.
185 *Ep*. 7, 325d-326b
186 *Rep.* VI 506c
187 *Rep.* VI 506d-e
188 γελοῖον (VI 504d): "make the ridiculous" of worrying about the insignificant and leaving aside the important; (VI 505b): those who say that Good is the intelligence of good are ridiculous / laughing / "fun"; (VI 506d): Socrates fears that he will not be able to say what the Good is and do the ridiculous, when trying it; (VI 509c): καὶ ὁ Γλαύκων μάλα γελοίως: Gláucon "laughs out loud" at Socrates' metaphysical outbreak and says mockingly: "extraordinary transcendence!"

what he calls "the offspring of the Good". It is the simile of the Sun, which we had already seen, and whose overall message is that the Idea of the Good can be compared with the Sun. Socrates´ description is almost epic. Glaucon reacts once, saying: "An inconceivable beauty you speak of, if it is the source of knowledge and truth, and yet itself surpasses them in beauty"[189], and, since Socrates continues, claiming that the Good gives every other idea "their being and essence", Glaucon reacts for a second time. This is the way in which Plato describes this second reaction: "And Glaucon *very ludicrously*, said, "Heaven save us, hyperbole can no further go"[190]. As in Book II, Glaucon is mocking at Socrates. The Socratic way of speaking about the idea of the good, somehow deifying it, amuses Glaucon and makes him laugh. However, this time Socrates reaction is different from that in Book II: he does not back down in his argument, neither does he reformulate his position. Instead, he responds heavily, blaming Glaucon for having reached such a point – "The fault is yours," he says, "for compelling me to utter my thoughts about it"[191]. Indeed, from the beginning he had warned Glaucon about his incapacity to give an account of the idea of the Good: "I fear that my powers may fail and that in my eagerness I may cut a sorry figure and become ridiculous"[192]. The though here has to do with the limits of the *logos,* and Socrates himself develops it. Despite its high value and utility, he states that "we have no adequate knowledge of the Good"[193]; the multitude believes pleasure to be the Good, while "the finer spirits" say it is "intelligence or knowledge", nonetheless, even these "finer spirits" cannot indicate intelligence *of what*, and they end up affirming that the Good consists in the intelligence of the Good![194]. In the end, the conclusion is that *nobody* really knows what the Good is. What we know, instead and paradoxically, is that the Good is something in relation to which we are "baffled and unable to apprehend its nature adequately, or to attain to any stable belief"[195]. Socrates says that the Good is that "which every soul pursues and for its sake does all that it does"; but this famous statement continues:

> "with an intuition of its reality, but yet baffled and unable to apprehend its nature adequately, or to attain to any stable belief about it as about other things, and for that reason failing of any possible benefit from other things"[196].

189 *Rep.* VI 509a
190 Καὶ ὁ Γλαύκων μάλα *γελοίως*, Ἄπολλον, ἔφη, δαιμονίας ὑπερβολῆς. *Rep.* VI 509c
191 *Rep.* VI 509c
192 *Rep.* VI 506d: προθυμούμενος δὲ ἀσχημονῶν *γέλωτα* ὀφλήσω.
193 *Rep.* VI 505a
194 *Rep*. VI 505b-e
195 *Rep*. VI 505e
196 *Rep*. VI 505e

And, what is more striking, Socrates puts on the table the possibility that the Good remains in this condition even to those in "whose hands we are to entrust all things"[197]. Who are, indeed, the "finer spirits" that Socrates just referred to? The answer is obvious: the philosopher and, more precisely, the philosopher-king.

So let us go back to the Cave now. Glaucon´s mockery in Book VI regarding Socrates´ "exaggeration" is, in a way, comparable to that of the prisoners of the Cave in relation to the redeemer´s discourse when he goes back to the underground. When the redeemer goes back to the Cave and tries to explain what he has seen during his journey and to free his old fellows, they call him crazy and eventually kill him. In the anticlimax of the story, which is at the same time its ending, we see the redeemer committed to discredit the spectacle and persuading his old fellows to leave the Cave, and the captives leaving their lethargy and passiveness and, first, laughing at him, to then, eventually, killing him. The redeemer, as we said, dies as a martyr. Beyond the tragic and pessimistic connotations implicit in such an ending, what interests us here is to highlight the *reason* that elicits the prisoners' fury. Before that, a quick word regarding the *nature* of the prisoner´s fury. We have interpreted the celebration of the prisoners inside the Cave as the rise of public opinion: the "seal of truth" that the captives print on their *doxa,* we said, is increased in the company of their peers. When *doxa* is collective, it gains force and makes even the worst life possible, a bearable one. But when Socrates asks: "if it were possible [to the captives] to lay hands on the man who tried to release them and lead them up, would they not kill him?"[198], we are before a second collective manifestation of the prisoners of the Cave and of the power of public opinion. The thought, here, is that opinion, consolidated in the midst of praise and turmoil, easily turns into dogma, dogma into fanaticism and fanaticism into fury and violence. This is not an unusual idea in Plato. In Book VI, for example, we find the image of the maddened sailors[199]: there is a vessel, the captain and the sailors; none of the sailors has any knowledge of the art of navigation, no one knows how to read the sky, the winds, the tides, but they all compete with each other in agitated strife to access the helm. They insubordinate, snatch the helm from the captain's hands and immobilize him. In the end, they eliminate him – and also kill each other (τοὺς ἄλλους ἀποκτεινύντας). Likewise, the prisoners, who now nothing, want their dogmas to prevail because they feel safe there. Among other things, this communicates that engagement in the illusion elicited by sensible

197 *Rep*. VI 505e
198 *Rep.* VII 517a
199 *Rep.* VI 488a et seq.

"knowledge" is not just a cognitive phenomenon, but an event with practical and moral consequences.

In the Cave´s ending, the captives laugh at the redeemer because they do not understand him and his discourse sound like a delirium. In a way, the captives and the redeemer live in two incommensurate worlds (the two "sections" of the Divided Line) as, *in a way*, Glaucon and Socrates do. Glaucon, of course, is quite a sophisticated interlocutor: he would never make fun of Socrates, for example and as we have seen before, in the terms in which Thrasymachus does; much less he would kill him. Glaucon would never kill Socrates… but Athens would. The reference is, as many have highlighted, practically inescapable: the redeemer that becomes a martyr in the Cave refers, in many ways, to the historical Socrates. But it also refers to the philosophical Socrates: the one who defends the paradigm of self-mastery and of the *Kallipolis,* and, from a broad point of view, to philosophers in general and to philosopher-kings in particular*,* who, when the time comes, are unable to give a satisfactory account of the most crucial issues. And this is of the utmost importance for us: the reason for the captives´ incomprehension is, in a certain aspect, related to their own precarious and lamentable cognitive state; but it is much more than that: it is related to the inability of the enlightened to put into words, and perhaps – the reader doubts – to really have himself a full understanding of the contact with truth that he had experienced. Thus, this whole passage is not just a claim about the incompatibility of philosophical and public life: it is a claim about the limits of *logos*. In fact, the reader ends up hesitating about it all: is the enlightened really an enlightened? If Socrates cannot give an account of the Good, who can? Is it, at last, possible to *anyone* to give an account of the Good? Is the ideal of the philosopher a true paradigm or just a wish-thought? Does the idea of the Good exist at all and, if it exists, is it accessible to human intelligence, even in extremely exceptional cases? If it is accessible to human intelligence, is it communicable?

Final thoughts

Up to this point, good evidence of what we have been calling the *pessimistic* content of the *Republic* has been gathered. This content, that slips into the epistemology, the ethics and the politics advanced in the dialogue, can be traced back to the psychological domain and the theory of the tripartite soul, and has to do, fundamentally, though not exclusively, with the place given to the irrational parts, to *stasis* and to rational weaknesses. The way in which Plato develops these three topics is, in a way, highly *realistic*, as it expresses

human condition and experience as they reveal to an acute observer, interested in understanding and explaining them philosophically and, above all, capable of accepting its adverse aspects honestly, without avoiding them. In another way, however, the manner in which Plato develops these three topics becomes openly *pessimistic*, insofar it is not isolated, but unfolds in parallel to the construction of a hypothetical vision of a possible state in which such adverse aspects could come to be alleviated and, eventually, eliminated. This double and simultaneous gesture, that is: the gesture of proposing a paradigm but at the same time putting in evidence how and why that very paradigm is unsatisfactory, results in a tense contrast that has, as one of its main upshots, that of provoking a hesitation in the reader regarding the value and usefulness of the ideal as a parameter for a better life. When Sully states that the *Republic* is "an unsurpassed example of optimism"[200] he is absolutely wrong. When Popper criticizes the "dreams of perfection" of the *Republic* because they "are not restrained by reason", he evidently is not seeing the contrast, nor feeling the hesitation. When Strauss and Bloom state that the *Republic* should be interpreted in an ironic key, each utopian thesis signifying exactly the opposite of what it explicitly defends, they are underestimating the commitment and seriousness with which Plato embarks on the speculation about an alternative to deal with the obstacles to individual and collective progress. Both Popper, Strauss and Bloom seem to expect a conclusive message from the book, and *that*, we take it, is precisely what leads them to raise such radical and, to a large extent, unfair and scandalous interpretations of the work. Such a conclusive message simply does not exist; what exists, instead, is the hesitation. How is it possible that utopia and pessimism coexist at the heart of the *Republic*? And what could such coexistence mean? It is *the reader* who, after reaching the end of the dialogue**,** must deal with this problem and to make a decision about the better life that might be possible. A perennial value of the *Republic,* at least in what has to do with this specific issue, lays in the fact that it does not offer a finished answer, but has a stimulating potential for further thought. As Vegetti points out, what is on the table in the *Republic* is not so much *a* Platonic philosophy, but the space and the forms of philosophical thought *itself*[201]. This does not mean, obviously, that there are not certain theories which can be extracted and reconstructed as properly philosophical systems, with a general univocal meaning – who could ever doubt, for example, that the Theory of Ideas or that of the Tripartite Soul, are genuine Platonic theories? There are other issues, however – especially, in the *Republic,* those linked to its utopian nature – in which univocity is not so clear and the reflection remains open. In these cases, the dramatic and

200 SULLY (1887) p. 43.
201 VEGETTI (2010), pp. 271 et seq.

dialogical form, as well as the role of metaphors and mythical constructions play a great role, and the most challenging philosophical effort begins *beyond the dialogue itself.* It is worth noting, however, that this inconclusive character takes place not in an aporetic way, as in the Socratic dialogues, but in a way where reasons for and reasons against are given for the reader's independent consideration.

Another upshot of Plato´s simultaneous gesture of proposing a paradigm but at the same time putting in evidence how and why that very paradigm is unsatisfactory has to do with the widespread claim according to which the *Republic* is the first great work of utopianism ever written in Western literature. In view of what has been shown up to now, there is good ground to conclude that it is fair to claim such a thing *only if* it is simultaneously stated that the *Republic* is *also* the first great critique to utopianism ever written in Western literature. *The best* possible is impossible. This does not rule out, however, the possibility of *the better* and pessimism, after all, may have its utility.

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CHAPTER III: Pessimism

"The ancient philosophers, Heraclitus, Empedocles (...) and Plato (...) alredy taught pessimism (pessimismus)"

SCHOPENHAUER, A., *Senilia*

I

In the book *Pessimism: A History and Criticism* (1877), James Sully, considered the first historian of the phenomenon, states that pessimism existed among Greeks from archaic times. He detects pessimistic traits in the poets' discourse. Thus, he quotes Hesiod, when he says that "The land and the sea are full of evils, and day and night heavy burdens hang on human beings" (*Works and days*, ll. 90-105); Homer, when he laments that "among all the things that breathe and move there is nothing more miserable on earth than man"(*Iliad*, 446-7) and Sophocles, when he claims that "not to have been born would be the best, but having seen the light of day it is preferable to return as soon as possible to where you came from" (*Oedipus in Colon*, 1225). Sully also claims that pre-Socratic philosophers were pessimists as long as they had a deep sense of the unfathomable character of the universe[202], but states, however, that this perception withdraws towards the classical era. He observes that, at the cosmological level, an optimistic alternative emerged since order and harmony, in association with a regulatory principle or process, began to be seen as predominant, while, at the epistemological level, the idea that "truth" is, for the most, accessible, gained force. This is the context in which human nature becomes the focus of attention, and Sully claims that:

> "All the leading ethicists, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, (…) seem tacitly to have presupposed that good in some shape lies within human reach. At least, they all resolve the *summum bonum* into something compassable by human volition and effort (…) The main Greek

202 In fact, the following words of Empedocles´ treatise *On Nature* are suggestive: "fixing their sights on the small part of life in plants and animals, swift-fated, rising like smoke, they fly off, convinced of only one thing, whatever each has bumped into, as they are driven in all directions, boasting that he has found the whole".

> moralists encouraged a cheerful and hopeful view of life by emphasizing the attainability of the good"[203].

When speaking about the Platonic case, the author refers to the cosmological bias: to Plato, creation happens in the form of an imposition of intelligence over necessity, and evil becomes a phenomenon confined to the sensitive world as a spectrum of the Ideal:

> "It may be said, indeed, that Plato´s thought constitute a system of optimism which has hardly been surpassed, even by the most favorable interpretations of Christian theology"[204].

Despite admitting that there are, even if implicitly, some not entirely optimistic traits in Plato´s thinking (he cites, for example, the distinction between true and illusory sources of happiness; the fact that pleasure presupposes, in most of its manifestations, a state of pain, etc.). in Sully's words Platonic thought is "optimistic to the core"[205].

However, not few scholars interpret the issue in an entirely opposite direction, using the term pessimistic to describe several aspects of Platonic thought. As a matter of fact, especially in recent times, the use of the adjective to label this or that position has notably increased.

II

An early discussion on the subject is the one that took place in the XXth century between Vlastos and Gould[206]. In the book entitled *The development of Plato's Ethics*, published in 1955, Gould defends an interpretation according to which between the first and the last Platonic dialogues there is a "gradual abandonment"[207] of an idealistic moralism of Socratic ascendence and that, in its place, an ethics adapted to the human condition emerges: an ethics "of the masses", or, if the expression is uncomfortable, at least not just an ethics "of the enlightened minority". The Socratic dialogues suggest what we might call the force of truth, that is, the well-know thesis according to which no one errs willingly, and build a "moral

203 SULLY (1987), p. 41-42.
204 Ibidem., p. 44
205 Ibidem., p. 43. According to Sully, the pessimistic inclination will be resumed only in the Hellenic period with the development of philosophy in Alexandria (Neoplatonism and Neopitagorism). Regarding this late period, he comments that "happiness had become so linked to the intellectual exercise of truth that abandoning the search for absolute truth naturally led to a pessimistic view of existence" (Ibidem. p. 44).
206 Cf. a previous analysis of this discussion in: COSTA RUGNITZ (2012) pp. 114-118.
207 GOULD (1955) p. 182

idealism" on this belief[208]; it is precisely this idealism, according to Gould, that Plato gradually leaves behind, dragged by what he calls a "reality principle"[209].

The author focuses on the problems regarding knowledge. In the context of the *Republic,* he concentrates on Book V, from 474b on, where the distinction between *doxa* and *episteme* is developed, calling attention to the way in which it is developed. According to him, the concept of opinion is introduced in previous dialogues but without the heavy implications of negative qualities that are highlighted in the *Republic;* for example, in the *Menon*, opinion is "true" opinion (*alethes doxa*); it is not knowledge, but it is a second best (*deuteros plous*), a *pis aller*, a valid and even positive substitute for truth. In the *Republic*, instead, the reflection on this same issue develops within a much more tense context. We have already seen that context in the previous chapter: it is a context in which knowledge and opinion, despite certain proximity, are seen as essentially different *dunameis*, and Gould states that one of the main corollaries that can be extracted from this way of putting things is that "the content of the world of phenomena (…) is described as unreal, in so far as no predicate that is wholly true can be asserted of it"[210]. This, as the author himself emphasizes, is an epistemological, not a metaphysical claim. There will be place for a metaphysical claim along these lines but, for now, the issue has to do with knowledge. Thus, Gould´s though is that "once Plato accepted (…) the belief that in this world and about this world no certainty can be achieved, the way was open for the full feeling of despair"[211].

On the other hand, Gould brings in another key-concept within this general picture: the concept of necessity. Necessity, introduced in *Republic* as responsible for individual and political decay[212], is, according to Gould, one of the most characteristic notes of the emerging pessimism. What happens in Books VIII to X is, for him, a chronicle of inevitable decline. So he asks:

> "why, following immediately on the most concentrated and powerful attempt at construction that he had so far undertaken, does Plato now portray the other side of the medal, the progressive defeat and decline of the human spirit? Plato seems to feel the embarrassment of this question, and answers it: 'Hard it may be for a society so constituted to be shaken; yet decay is the universal fate of all things in this world of change, nor will even a framework such as we have built last for all time: it must suffer dissolution.' (*Rep.* 546a). Here a feeling that lies

208 GOULD Op. Cit. p. 96.
209 Ibidem. pp. 131 et. Seq.
210 Ibidem. p. 158.
211 Ibidem. p. 163.
212 *Rep.* VIII 545d-547b

> behind much of the Republic comes out into the open, a sense of the ineradicable process of decay, of a distance from the Ideal too far to be traversed: it is this that makes up the note of sadness"[213]

"This *note of pessimism*"[214], he states immediately, gains in strength in other dialogues and becomes completely visible in the *Timaeus*. When the myth of creation is told in *Timaeus*, necessity does not play a minor role: *anagké* refers to a background which becomes visible in contrast to the *nous*, the ordering principle. What is relevant for us in the present context is that necessity, from Gould´s perspective, is a force that the Demiurge overcomes, but without a complete success:

> "The cosmos has come into existence through the victory of rational persuasion (*peithous emphronos*) over necessity: it is only a victory "for the most part", but without even such a victory, no cosmos at all would be possible."[215].

Now, while in *Timaeus* cosmological issues are dominant, it is possible to draw important conclusions regarding human soul also, says Gould. In order to do this, he quotes Cornford, when he states that necessity is, in a sense, a picture of the part of the cosmos in which the works of reason are left out. But when the rational is thus abstracted, "what is left will be irrational Soul, a cause of wandering motions, and an unordered element of the bodily, itself moving without plan or measure"[216]. So, Gould asks: "if the Demiurge can only persuade to guide the greater part of things in this world "towards what is best", can the human reason ever attain perfection in the moral sphere?"[217]. His answer is that it cannot. He concludes that the implications of Plato's view of necessity are pessimistic not only in the cosmological domain and that the faculty of *nous* will have also limited powers of persuasion over necessity, that is, over irrationality, *within human soul*; thus, moral development would be seriously limited by the bonds which tie the soul to the bodily. This, Gould claims, is "fatal" to an idealist morality of the Socratic type. In the *Timaeus,* in fact, when human soul is created, it enters time and

213 GOULD, Op. Cit. pp. 182-183.
214 Idem.
215 Ibidem. p. 198.
216 Quoted in: GOULD (1955), p. 198. Gould recognizes that there are other senses for the word *anagké*. For example, he states that necessity can sometime refer to a sort of inevitable order (*taxis*), chance *(tuxé)*, or be "a word for those unavoidable but fortuitous undesirable characteristics of the material which the Demiurge must work upon", that is, matter (p. 194). However, he ends up following Cornford, and, for the most, regarding *anagké* as that which is left when reason is absent. This is why he refers to it as *irrationality.* In view of the opposition between *anagké* and *cosmos,* he sometimes refers to it as *chaos.*
217 GOULD Ibidem. p. 199.

space and then passions (*pathemata*) collide with intelligence (*nous*). In designing human beings the gods were also forced by necessity and, as in the greater creational plan, it was indispensable for them to include matter, that is, the body, with which they anchored the subject in the sensible world. This is not a new position, but the author points out that in the context of the *Timaeus* it receives a different emphasis: intelligence and sensations are, in a very important way opposite, but still irrevocably united. This entails that while the soul is capable, by means of the divine in it, of assimilation to the world of Forms, it is also subjected to irrationality by its lower aspects. "In describing the creation of the human soul, Plato dwells on the inescapability of sensation and emotion"[218]. This is what happens in the human circumstance "because necessity demands it so" (*Tim*. 47e).

Given the *anagkaia pathemata*, "the psyche incurs in an involuntary predisposition to evil, which can be partially circumvented only through rigorous training". The concepts of proportion (*summetria*) and measure (*tó metron*) are concentrated, according to Gould, in the dialogues of the last period; in the first dialogues, the irrational must be removed, while in the later it is finally assumed as something unremovable:

> "From these hints, one may perhaps reasonably infer that pessimism is the distinguishing mark (…) of the whole group of 'late' dialogues. The *Timaeus* would stand as prelude to this group, in making explicit the source of pessimism, the ever incomplete victory of Reason over Necessity" [219]

The author draws attention to how the tripartite psychology of the *Republic* and its ascendant, that of the *Phaedrus*, are in a way completed in the *Timaeus*. In the *Timaeus*, Plato adjudicates a physical location to the three *eide* of the soul, a location that he justifies in a moral key: the neck avoids an exaggerated proximity between the head – where reason, the divine element, is located, and the chest (specifically the heart), which is the seat of emotion, the *thumos*; this occurs, according to Plato, because the primary source of energy "needs to be close" in order to "listen" to rational recommendations[220]. The vehicle of passion, *to epithumetikós*, is represented as a Fury and located in the stomach and the intestine. The body, from this point of view, tears the spiritual unity of man, robs him of the possibility of being a pure divine element; and it is appetite that subjects the soul to "slavery", that is, to the influx of

218 GOULD Op. Cit. p. 197.
219 Ibidem. p. 203.
220 We have developed the issue of "communication of the parts of the soul" in: COSTA RUGNITZ (2012) pp. 67-73.

irrationality. This will be the position in which, according to Gould, the psychology of the *Republic* will end.

What is more: in the *Republic*, he states, necessity emerges as something inexorable. In fact, in Book VIII it is stated that "for everything that has come into being, dissolution is appointed"[221]. This is the memorable "Discourse of the Muses", which, according to Gould, is further evidence of the limited power of *nous* over *necessity.* After the initial "genetic error", the subject becomes corrupted in a long strain of degeneration which, as we claimed in the previous chapter, can be seen as a progressive liberation of the appetitive part of the soul; in this line, Gould sees "the spectacle of a man dictated to by passions that he cannot control, and in a perpetual state of war not only with his fellow men, but even with himself"[222] in the transformation that takes place in Books VIII and IX. For him, the power of the irrational reaches its highest point in Book X, with the Myth of Er, in which the irrationality that presses the human soul and pushes it towards the antipodes of the good life is extended beyond death. We will come back to this later; for now, the point is, according to Gould, that the concept of necessity grows "from a mere tint, a suspicion of darkness in a bright whole, to colour the entire work"[223].

The author states that pessimism will develop in complexity and depth after the *Republic*, the. He specifically argues that pessimism, which is anticipated in the *Meno*, gains a clear shape in the *Republic* and then extends through the *Timaeus*, the *Statesman* and the *Philebus*, finally crowning itself, already fully formed, in the *Laws*:

> "Plato is still grappling with enormous intensity and passion with the problems of human existence, but it is now from a different standpoint. This standpoint is one which recognizes humanity as naturally prone to evil (…) We are no longer surprised to find Plato citing 'the general viciousness' (*Laws*, 840d) as the cause of a dilemma. In a sense, the Athenian admits, we are justified in feeling shame for the depravity which we seem to expect in human beings (…) But we are not in the position of the great legislators of the past: we legislate as men for men, our society is not heroic, semi-divine, nor are our laws (…) There is, in the *Laws* (…) a common-sense appraisal of moral problems which by comparison with earlier Platonism, one might be tempted to call un-Platonic"[224].

221 *Rep.* VIII 546a
222 GOULD Op. Cit. p. 187.
223 Ibidem. p. 184.
224 GOULD Op. Cit. pp. 102-103.

So from Gould´s perspective, there seems to be, somehow, a philosophical positive outcome of the increasing pessimism: in the *Laws,* he suggests, Plato ends up thinking about the best possible life, both for individuals and for society, taking as a starting point not an idealist conception of human beings, but a much more *realistic* one.

Two years after Gould´s publication, Gregory Vlastos reacted to this interpretation with a certain indignation, in an article entitled *Socratic knowledge and platonic "pessimism"*. The quotation marks anticipate his position. Gould had suggested that Plato gradually abandoned Socrates' idealistic morality and stated that, in its place, a pessimism grew slowly in the sequence *Meno*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Politician*, *Philebo* and *Laws*. The main target of Vlastos´ critique is the *Timaeus*. He argues that the purpose of this dialogue is exactly the opposite of what was established by Gould: in the *Timaeus,* the emphasis is not on the chaotic irrational background, but on power of intelligence which imposes itself over that very chaotic irrational background to submit it. Necessity recedes in the face of intelligence: *that* is the point of the narrative. From Vlastos' point of view, Gould is openly wrong: there is no pessimism at all in the *Timaeus* message and the moral of the creation epic has to do with the triumph of *nous*, and neither with the details of the battle nor with the destiny of the loser! "In the concluding sentence of this dialogue, Plato speaks of the created world as a "perceptible good, the greatest, most excellent, most beautiful, most perfect". Does this sound like a cry of despair?", he asks[225]. The lover of "true" Beauty will never be satisfied with anything he meets this side of eternity"[226], Vlastos accepts, but he adds:

> "One can look at this world thinking "It's just a copy", and feeling a kind of malaise or nostalgia, an impatience with the best the world can offer; or [...] one can say to oneself: "But it is an excellent copy, such as only supreme intelligence joined with perfect goodness could produce", and rejoice at one´s good luck to find oneself in a world like this"[227]

Thus, Vlastos recognizes that the cosmological message of the *Timaeus* is "ambiguous"[228], meaning that it involves irrational *ananke* on the one side and *nous* and "good" creation on the other. However, the fact that the victory of intelligence over necessity is

225 VLASTOS (1957), p. 232.
226 Idem.
227 Idem.
228 VLASTOS Op. Cit. pp. 232-233.

essentially incomplete does not imply, for him, any pessimistic outcome, and the problem with his critique is that the reasons to discard pessimism do not have to do, on the main, with philosophical considerations, but with somehow subjective reactions: he talks about “nostalgia” or “rejoice”, as if it were a matter of deciding what to “feel”. Thus, he seems to believe that it is a question of internal ways of reacting to the theoretical ambivalence. In the same way that Gould deviates from the point when he uses terms such as "despair", “sadness”, etc., Vlastos is also inopportune when he talks about "joy", "nostalgia", “despondence”, etc. Regarding the issue of the impossibility of attaining any firm knowledge about the sensible world, he perpetuates the same kind of approach. After considering the several senses in which the substantive *episteme* and the verb *espistasthai* can be understood, he states that “certainty about this world is not needed for any purpose which Plato considers essential” and asks: “Have not many modern philosophers renounced “the question of certainty” without noticeable gloom? Why not Plato?”[229]. Regardless of how objectionable the assertion that certainty is unnecessary for Plato's ultimate interests, we insist on the misconception: it is not about how much Plato “renounces”, “feels gloom” or “enthusiasm” for the world; it is about his philosophical conception of that very world and its theoretical implications. It is not about how ideas affect emotional dispositions, but about how ideas *affect ideas*. This is a distinction to which we will come back later, but that deserves to be introduced right away: scholars have distinguished between pessimism in the ordinary sense of the word, that is, as a subjective tendency and an inclination of the character or personality that looks at a certain fact from a certain perspective (as in the vulgar example of the glass that has water up to half, in which the individual who “sees” the half empty is the pessimist, the one who “sees” the half full is the optimist) and is prone to internal dispositions such as depression, melancholy etc., and pessimism in the theoretical or properly philosophical sense, which is related to a given set of conceptual content. The issue, here, is quite simple: independently of how enthusiastic the reader or Plato himself could subjectively react in relation to the, in fact ambivalent, binomials original-copy, knowledge-opinion, will-necessity, etc. and their consequences over metaphysics, epistemology, ethics etc., it is evident that they entail a bleak position – how could anyone ever defend the opposite, for example, regarding what happens inside the cave in *Republic* VII?.

Plato´s pessimism – which, as we have insisted here from the beginning, does not exhaust his thought, as long as it develops simultaneously with an utopian position – has to do with the vision of an adverse and unavoidable chaotic background and with the philosophical

229 Ibidem. p. 233.

reasons to hesitate about idealistic morality. *This* is the Platonic pessimism at stake, a pessimism which should be considered seriously, without quotation marks. Plato assumes this vision *objectively, theoretically* in the *Republic,* when he designs the educational scheme, builds the paradigmatic state, both for culture in general and for the individual in particular, etc. The point, thus, is to understand what part or what effect pessimism has over such designs. To talk about Plato´s "mood" (as Vlastos does[230]), is completely out of question.

Moving forward in his article, however (and despite the constant misuse of the term), Vlastos at last concedes that there may be a certain relationship between Plato and pessimism: there is a "happy hope", he says, to which Plato "resigns" before his death[231]: the "faith" in enlightened absolutism and the "trust" that the office of the philosopher-king was not above the capacities of human nature. Against Gould´s interpretation – which, as Vlastos himself highlights, is an interpretation "shared by scholars of the highest eminence"[232] – he states that Plato "dared to believe"[233] this was false when he wrote the *Republic,* but not when he wrote the *Laws.* In the *Republic* and the *Statesman* "that faith was still intact"; in the *Laws,* however, Plato renounces to it and explicitly states not one, but three times, that the office of the philosopher-king is contrary to human nature[234].

From our point of view, and as we have tried to show in the previous chapter, although in the *Republic* Plato does not explicitly deny the possibility of the existence of the philosopher-king, he puts it in doubt through a dense argumentation that has a psychological root. But Vlastos (and Gould, and other interpreters, as we shall see in the last section of this chapter and in the conclusions) is right when he states that the position is clearer in the *Laws.* However, Vlastos incurs in the same misleading reasoning when he tries to explain or, better, to track the grounds of such a change in Plato´s position. He proceeds by trying to find out the source of the "disillusionment"[235] not in the philosophical enterprise itself, but, in this case, in the context of Plato´s biography. His "guess" is that what "indulged the impulse to despair" and the "collapse of the hope" was the "crisis" experienced by Plato after his final encounter with Dionysius the Younger, when Plato was about 60 years old. Again, the question here is: what is that "pessimism" we are talking about? While there is a certain sense in which bridges can

230 VLASTOS Op. Cit. p. 232.
231 Ibidem. p. 233.
232 And here he quotes Campbell, secs. III and V of his *Introduction to the Politicus* (London, i867); Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon*, 4th ed. (Berlin, I948), pp. 459-460; Taylor, *Plato*, 6th ed. (London, I949), pp. 402-403; G. M. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London, I935), pp. 279-284 and Dies, sec. VI of his *Introduction to the Politicus* (Paris, 1935), and his note on 30id, e; P. Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago, 1933), pp. 313-314.
233 VLASTOS Ibidem. p. 234.
234 *Laws* 691c; 713c; 875b-d.
235 VLASTOS Ibidem. p. 237.

indeed be drawn between the thinking activity of a philosopher and his personal experiences, the main task, although something artificial there may be in it (and we will return to this later) must be always to track evidence in arguments. In any case, as there seems to be something adequate in linking the life and the work of thinkers, since, before being thinkers, they are men, an answer to Vlastos could be the following: Plato does not have a "consolidated faith" neither in moral intellectualism nor in enlightened absolutism at the time when he writes the *Republic*, but an evident hesitation, of pessimistic ascent, which is strengthened as time goes by until it is abandoned in the late dialogues; if we were to look in his biography for events that trigger this change in beliefs, long before the experiences in Syracuse, we should rather consider, perhaps, the figure of Socrates and his final death sentence by Athens.

But let us leave aside this kind of speculation; stimulating as it may be, it will take us too far away from the direction we want to give to our meditation. Going back to Vlastos´ article, we shall now pay attention to its final conclusions. Vlastos states that after the "disappointment" experienced in Syracuse, "we don't see Plato turning away from the world" or "dropping in weariness or disgust all practical projects for making this world less stupid and less evil"; instead, he still writes the *Laws*. And in writing the *Laws,* he "turns to an empirical study of the legal institutions (…) with an attentiveness one would never have suspected" [236]. And he adds:

> "The eagerness to understand the world so far as it can be understood and to improve it so far as it can be improved is the dominant of Plato´s last years. Clouds of weariness move across the skies (…) but they never darken it. There is much "acceptance of reality", to use one of Gould´s favorite expressions, but it is not pessimistic"[237]

Two remarks here. First, Vlastos is, once again, working with an uncritical conception of pessimism, as long as he suggests that, were Plato a pessimist, he would not only have fallen into despair, melancholy, etc. but, in the end, he would have finally turned his back on the world and given up every active enterprise. In this case, the prejudice is that pessimism entails paralyzation, if not nihilism and inactivity. That Plato continues to write in his later years, Vlastos states, is *evidence* that he has escaped the dark clouds of pessimism. But this is not the only alternative. In response to this, we shall refer once again the recent studies on pessimism. Thus, Dienstag says that:

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236 VLASTOS Op. Cit. p. 238
237 Idem.

> "Of course, some pessimisms might result in such a posture. But to assume that all pessimists are thus is akin to claiming that (…) every theory of progress is Panglossian (…) Not all pessimisms are suicidal or nihilistic. (…) In the right hands, pessimism can be – and *has* been – an energizing and even a liberating philosophy. While it does indeed ask us to limit and eliminate some of our hopes and expectations, it can also provide us with the means to better navigate the bounded universe it describes" [238].

Second, the fact that Plato continues to write in his last years, and that he does so *in the way he does*, that is, with an unprecedent interest in empirical historical data, for example, can perfectly be *evidence* of exactly the opposite of what Vlastos suggests: Plato´s thought may well be, especially in the late works, a much less idealistic thought precisely *in virtue* of the growth of a reality principle which is, on its turn, the most immediate result of a deeply pessimistic approach. Plato has not escaped the dark clouds of pessimism. He has penetrated darkness, and darkness has allowed him to see better. In any case, what we can say here with greater confidence is that there is good ground this is something that happens within the *Republic* itself.

Vlastos´ last words in this article put up a bigger challenge. He says that Plato´s

> "model-copy way of looking at the relation of the ideal to the actual is a remedy to the impulse of despair. If the world is *only* a copy, one does not expect it to be perfect and can assimilate new discoveries of its limitations without shattering disillusionment. And if it *is* a copy of perfection, man can expect enough of order and goodness in it to sustain his efforts to make it a little more perfect than he found it"[239]

There is something very appealing on this formulation. However, the author's omnipresent will to "save" Plato from pessimism and his somehow stubborn resistance to accept the existence and possible value of such pessimism are also manifest in it. Against this, it only remains to insist on the theoretical potential of such pessimism, but this is an idea to which we will only return in the conclusions. But there is one last resort: to draw attention to the fact that

238 DIENSTAG (2009) p. ix.
239 VLASTOS, Op. Cit. P. 238.

contemporary discussion continues to put the issue on the table and to offer new reasons in favor of the pessimistic reading[240].

III

In the XXIst century we can find the word pessimist applied to Plato´s thought, for example, in Christopher Bobonich´s *Plato´s Utopia Recast* (2002). There are many ideas in this book that can contribute to our argument here. We could bring into discussion, for example, the issue of the nature of the so-called "parts" of the soul and Bobonich´s claim that there is evidence to consider that they are not just bearers of desires and aversions, but also of cognitive resources that involve a sort of rationality (being this the reason why they are able to form impulses to act with in view of considerations of what is good from a long-term perspective) and that, being so, they are agent-like principles. If the parts are agent-like principles, Bobonich states, then they can undergo *stasis* and if they can undergo *stasis,* the soul can undergo further partition. This, he claims, brings important issues regarding, for example, the unity of the person[241], or, as we prefer to call it, important issues regarding identity. From this perspective the person would be, or would at least be prone to become, many persons in a much radical way than that required by the Principle of Opposition in the context of Book IV. We have considered the topic of the cognitive capacities of the irrational parts of the soul and that of the *homunculi* elsewhere[242]. This is a very actual topic, indeed, but one we have not reached a mature

240 In 1999, Dominic Scott wrote an article entitled *Platonic pessimism and moral education*, published in Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy. There, the issue at stake is, again, the possibility of knowledge. According to Scott, there is a certain a type of character impermeable to dialectics, a psychic disposition in which the motivational apparatus is completely immune to rational argument. After analyzing the cases of Polus and Chalices of the *Gorgias*, Scott studies that of Thrasymachus in Book I of the *Republic* and states that, with them, Plato deliberately draws attention to the problem of *intransigence*, which consists, fundamentally, in the fact that some interlocutors have so deeply ingrained opinions that they will never be able to renounce to them. It is not only, Scott says, a reluctance to accept unpleasant, different judgments, but a failure to follow and accept evidence and to change behavior in accordance240. In the *Republic*, observes Scott, Plato takes a step further by withdrawing Thrasymachus from the scene and substituting him by Glaucon and Adimantus. According to the author, the thought here is that: "Philosophical dialogue is no longer for everyone: in effect, those who did not enjoy character training when young can reach a point where intellectual discipline does not do them good anymore. Argumentation will have no effect; it will produce laughter, violent reactions or no response at all. This depressing point of view is shown in its most extreme form after the account of the educational program in Book VII" SCOTT (1999). Again, we come across inappropriate expressions like "depressing view". But the underlying insight is correct: "The conflict between the rational and the non-rational results in the expulsion of certain beliefs inherited from reason and, in its place, in the adoption of new beliefs in accordance with the wishes of the irrational parts". This is, according to Scott, a circumstance of which Plato is fully aware in the *Republic*; and this awareness is what makes him a pessimist.

241 BOBONICH (2002) p. 254-57.

242 Cf. COSTA RUGNITZ (2012) pp. 24-36; 62-67.

conclusion about. However, what we can say with a certain confidence is that, independently from analytical efforts, the very psychology of the *Republic* offers explicit evidence of the fragility of self-identity: the memorable image of the soul in Book IX as composed of a human, a lion, and a hydra-headed beast ends, for example, with the following words:

> "Join the three in one, then, so as in some sort to grow together." "They are so united (…) Then mould about them outside the likeness of one, that of the man, so that to anyone who is unable to look within but who can see only the external sheath it appears to be one living creature, the man."[243]

Personal unity is presented here as a mere external appearance which hides the real nature of the subject, which is precisely the contrary: in the best case, one of composition, in the worst, one of essential fragmentation and self-differentiation. This does not exhaust the image of the soul offered in the *Republic*, since it is true that the entire educational project, for example, is built in order to achieve a unified soul and that the unified soul is, in fact, in a certain sense the very essence of the just soul, that is, of the paradigm of personal fulfillment. However, if what was established in the previous chapter is true (if *stasis* is inescapable, if reason lacks sufficient strength to perform its proper function, etc.) then a disturbing thought arises: as long as the justice of the soul is not attainable, or at least while it is not attained, the "self" is nothing but an illusion. A further illusion, a previous and more primitive illusion than that related to the state of ignorance of the world that arises from opinion anchored in the *aisthesis*.

But let us focus on another idea present in Bobonich´s text that is especially useful to our point. It is the idea that, in the *Republic,* Plato believes that the great majority of people are not capable of leading a life worth living due to their psychic and ethical condition: "Plato's middle-period view of the capacities of non-philosophers to acquire genuine virtue and thus to lead happy lives was deeply pessimistic"[244], he states. To be virtuous, in the *Republic*, means eminently to be a philosopher. Bobonich considers the fact that in this dialogue each virtue is analyzed in terms of parts of the soul and depends, to be genuine, on the prior possession of knowledge of the Forms. From this standpoint, he draws a conclusion regarding happiness in the political context of the *Kallipolis:* as long as true virtue depends on the possession of wisdom and, thus, of knowledge, since auxiliaries and artisans lack knowledge (their "virtue"

243 *Rep.* IX 588d-e.
244 BOBONICH Op. Cit. p. 236.

is not based on their own, direct and rational grasp of the Idea of the Good, but, rather, on an irrational *habit,* elicited in a mediated way by those who *do* know the idea of the good, that is, by the philosopher-rulers, through an educational system designed precisely to direct their behavior so that it does not threaten their own well-being or that of the social group), they also lack true virtue. Non-philosophers are not capable of the knowledge that is required for virtue; thus, they are neither capable of exercising virtue in the proper sense nor of autonomously valuing what is truly good:

> "According to the *Republic´s* official characterization of virtue in Book IV, since non-philosophers fail to possess wisdom, they fail to possess genuine virtue. Nor does their education enable them to appreciate genuine value. In Book VII of the *Republic*, Plato considers whether the musical education received by the auxiliaries (…) tends to the good of leading the soul out of the Cave and into the light, that is, toward genuine reality. It does not, since this musical education does not provide knowledge, but only inculcates appropriate habits which do not in themselves furnish an appreciation of genuine reality (Rep. 522a-b). In the *Republic*, non-philosophers' cognitive defects and lack of genuine virtue have negative implications for their happiness. All the citizens of the *Republic´s* just city, except those who have been philosophically educated, remain in the Cave and this is a pitiable condition for a human being"[245].

According to Bobonich, the ethical character of the *Kallipolis´* citizens is not, strictly speaking, virtuous, since it is not based on knowledge, but on opinion; this opinion, even if it is true, is not the product of the development of their own intelligence, but rests, instead, on persuasion and unreflected adherence to exogenous values. The author emphasizes the fact that musical education, which together with gymnastics are all the formation of the crowd is about, are not headed at developing rationality. Thus, the "virtue" of the non-philosopher is not related to the *logistikón*; in a strict sense, then, besides being "mediated", it is limited to the *thumoeidés* and to the *epithumetikón:* the guardians and artisans take as their ultimate ends the proper objects of the irascible part and the appetitive part, which, by means of education, *happen to be* in accordance with what is Good. So, Bobonich asks:

> "What of non-philosophers' happiness? With this picture of the virtuous agent in place, we can better appreciate Plato's pessimism. Plato's conception of happiness is based on an understanding of what people are most fundamentally and people are, most fundamentally, their

245 BOBONICH Op. Cit. p. 7.

> Reasoning part. This is not to suggest that Plato must adopt a purely contemplative view of happiness, since the natural purpose of the Reasoning part is both to know the truth and to rule the soul. What is essential to the good functioning of the Reasoning part and thus to happiness is an appropriate response to value and this may include both knowing it and ordering things in accordance with it. So the failure of non-philosophers is not simply their failure to grasp value, but also their failure to express it appropriately in action[246].

In a way, non-philosopher´s "virtue" is nothing but an automatism and, being so, their happiness is fragile and artificial. One of the most pessimistic upshots of this can be seen, according to the author, in Book X. The Myth of Er suggests that some non-philosophers are admitted to heaven. Bobonich expounds the traditional reading first: if non-philosophers live in a fair city and under the control of the enlightened philosopher-king, under the guidance and supervision of those who have first-hand knowledge, they become as virtuous and happy as it is possible to them. However, he immediately rejects this reading: this "virtue" is not enough, because the inability to grasp the real value of things has fatal consequences, which is something Plato himself cares to make explicit. When the souls of those who are virtuous out of habit are offered the opportunity to choose a new way of life, they "make a mistake" in their choice: due to their ignorance, they choose to reincarnate as a tyrant, and are faded, therefore, to the terrible consequences presented in Book IX. This means that the *conjunctural* "virtuous" action of the non-philosopher has no ultimate positive outcome. "Even for him who comes last, if he makes his choice wisely and (…) there is reserved an acceptable life, no evil one"[247], the Myth says. But then:

> "When the prophet had thus spoken he said that the drawer of the first lot at once sprang to seize the greatest tyranny, and that in his folly and greed he chose it without sufficient examination, and failed to observe that it involved the fate of eating his own children, and other horrors, and that when he inspected it at leisure he beat his breast and bewailed his choice, not abiding by the forewarning of the prophet. For he did not blame himself for his woes, but fortune and the gods and anything except himself. He was one of those who had come down from heaven, a man who had lived in a well-ordered polity in his former existence, participating in virtue by habit and not by philosophy (…) Yet if at each return to the life of this world a man loved wisdom sanely, and the lot of his choice did not fall out among the last, we may venture to affirm, from what was reported thence, that not only will he be happy here but that the path of his journey thither and the return to this world will not

246 BOBONICH Op. Cit. p. 87.
247 *Rep.* X 619a

> be underground and rough but smooth and through the heavens. For he said that it was a sight worth seeing to observe how the several souls selected their lives" [248]

As Bobonich highlights, this eschatological myth communicates the final costs of non-philosophical virtue: with its lack of ability to recognize true value, this virtue is not of long-run benefit to its possessor. "Habitual virtue does not enable people to make good choices of their next life", he says; but one could well ask: to what extent, in fact, does it enable them to make good choices *during lifetime*, even in the context of an ideal city built for that purpose? The discourse of the Muses, which we mentioned above, comes immediately to mind, outlining a not very encouraging response. But coming back to the Myth of Er, Bobonich concludes: "Non-philosophical virtue at its best again fails to bring about a good ethical character and, most importantly from the perspective of the myth, does not bring with it ethical progress"[249]. This remark regarding progress brings serious issues regarding not only the desirability of the *Kallipolis* and of the psychological, "personal ideal" offered by the *Republic.* We shall keep it in mind, because it will be central to the final thoughts of the present work.

To end this section, a last word in relation to Bobonich´s interpretation of the *Republic*, which, roughly speaking, is summarized in the following extract:

> "The philosopher, that is, the person who sees things as they really are, would rather go through any suffering than live the lives of individuals trapped in the cave. In the *Republic*, all non-philosophers are in the cave and, thus, a pessimistic conclusion regarding their happiness is guaranteed. While it is true that the life of these subjects, and not just their cognitive condition, is regretted, such a life is regretted because of their cognitive condition"[250]

According to the author, Plato will continue to be a rational eudaimonist in the *Laws,* but he will project the "second-best" city, that is, the city of *Magnesia,* with an emphasis on the happiness of the citizens: the *telos* of legislation is, there, the virtue of the citizens and the enhancement of their capacity to grasp genuine value. What other aim could a social utopia have but this, namely, to consider, among the adversities that affect the great majority of the members of a given community, the most urgent, and to try to improve it as much as possible? This change of focus rests, according to the predominant view, in the fact that the *Republic* is

248 *Rep.* X 619b-e
249 BOBONICH Op. Cit. p. 77.
250 Ibidem p. 54.

Plato´s statement of what the ideally best city is; the *Laws,* a description of a better city that might be possible *given less optimistic assumptions about what human nature is capable of*[251]. This, we take it, can be regarded as one important benefit of philosophical pessimism, namely: an influence *of ideas over ideas* that results on a greater adjustment to given facts during the construction of paradigms. Perhaps *Magnesia* is, in comparison to the *Kallipolis,* a model, as Bloch says, "more mediated with the course of things".

IV

As it can be seen, the word pessimism has been used, at least since the second part of the XXth century, to refer to various aspects of Plato's thought. But to what extent is it appropriate to use it in relation to Plato's thought and, in particular, in relation to the content of the *Republic*? What is, after all, *pessimism*? Let us pay attention to these questions before going on.

The phenomenon of pessimism, as well as the word that designates it, do not belong exclusively to the philosophical domain but have been also present in colloquial life and language for at least three centuries. This carries the most basic difficulty: the lack of a univocal meaning – a difficulty that deepens when we consider the imprecise use intellectuals themselves often make of the term[252]. We have seen important interpreters using expressions such as "despair", "melancholy", etc., and stated that this is misleading. We will go a step further now, and claim that it is openly wrong. Despite the lack of a univocal meaning, some useful distinctions regarding pessimism have been made in recent literature. One of them is that between *temperamental* and *philosophical* pessimism: the first refers to a *subjective* state of the *particular* individual, has to do with personal dispositions and emotions, with a propensity to complain, melancholy, etc.; philosophical pessimism, differently, has an *intellectual nature*: it is the product of a *speculative process* and assumes a written expression that amounts to a specific tradition of thought which, despite not having a systematic nature, implies certain shared premisses or insights, among which the most relevant in the present context is the one that states and develops, *theoretically,* the limitations of intelligence to provide satisfactory

251 BOBONICH (2002/2020)

252 Among modern and contemporary philosophers, Rousseau, Leopardi, Nietzsche, Weber, Ortega y Gasset, Freud, Camus, Adorno, Foucault, etc. have declared themselves or their thought pessimistic or have been declared so by others. However, the term is used loosely. Nietzsche, for example, "singles out pessimism as his very own quintessence but (…) at the same time, speaks of many types of pessimism"; he makes "many references to pessimism without indicating which variety he is talking about" (DIENSTAG Op. Cit, p. 163).

answers and motivational results within the ethical domain. Given so, when we speak of Plato´s pessimism we are referring to Plato´s *writings* and its *theoretical outcomes*, instead of to his intimacy or personality, rich as they might be. In a similar way, the actions performed or not performed by Plato, that is, Plato´s biography and the practical aspect of his pessimism (if there is one) need to be left aside.

One reason for the vagueness of the concept of pessimism may be that, as an intellectual fact, it violently entered many different arenas of Western high culture, and quite recently. Not only can we find diverse manifestations of it in Philosophy (there is a metaphysical, an epistemological, moral, aesthetic, existential, etc. pessimism), but it occurs as a widespread label to sociologists, psychologists, economists, artists, etc. As we said in Chapter I, the word "pessimism" was included in Latin indexes in the late XVIIIth century; became used in the XIXth and finally settled in ordinary and erudite language in the XXth. It was born together – a little bit latter, in fact – with the concept of *optimism,* on its turn launched by Leibniz in his *Théodicée*. This concept spread from the intellectual sphere to currency with Voltaire´s *Candide ou l´Optimisme*; the correlative term "pessimist" made its first appearance in this context: it was used to refer Voltaire´s book[253]. But the *Candide* does not offer any pessimist proposal: it is reactive, a critique, and only reveals the anxiety of modern intelligence in the face of the belief that "the actual world is the best of all possible worlds". In this context, it could perhaps be stated that, in a way, the central, original insight of pessimism does not consist in a statement of the type "this is the worst possible world", but rather in a denial, of the type "this *is not* the best possible world".

But we must notice that the first explicit pessimist gesture, namely, Voltaire´s satire to *Panglossianism,* having been performed by the Enlightenment, is not, however, a distinctive feature of this movement. Quite on the contrary, from Voltaire onwards, Philosophical pessimism developed in the backstage of Enlightenment, as an "invisible tradition", eclipsed by the glare of the ideal of progress that was, yes, a bastion of the Modern movement[254].

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253 "Leibniz first used the term "optimum," as a correlate to "maximum" and "minimum" in his *Theodicee* of 1710. French writers then began to refer to his doctrine as one of optimisme. The international popularity of Voltaire's *Candide au I'Optimisme* of 1759 apparently propelled the term into English, but also provoked Voltaire's Jesuit critics in the Revue de Trevoux to accuse him of "pessimisme" (…) Lichtenberg uses the term "pessimismus" in 1766; in 1789 a satirical French play entitled *Le pessimiste au I'homme meconte de tout* appeared; and the first known printed appearance of "pessimism" in English follows shortly thereafter, although the context seems to indicate that the term was already in use. The French Academy admitted the word "optimisme" in 1762 but "pessimisme" only in 1878" (DIENSTAG Op. Cit. p. 9).

254 According to Dienstag, philosophical pessimism is a Modern phenomenon propitiated by the appearance of the Gregorian calendar and mechanical clocks in the bell towers in the Middle Ages. These events gave rise to an unprecedented perception of time, which had a revolutionary effect over European thought: time became linear and, thus, an open flow, directed indefinitely towards. This new, Modern perception of time, blended with the

In fact, from the point of view of history *of philosophy*, the word began to be used in the framework of Schopenhauer´s philosophy. The German philosopher is, indeed, considered to be *the father of Philosophical pessimism*: "Schopenhauer discovered, properly speaking, pessimism (…) He not only introduced the word in Philosophy, but made of pessimism a thesis with a critical function"[255].

So let us pay attention to Schopenhauer´s position. Schopenhauer´s pessimism should be understood starting from a metaphysical platform. In short, the guiding insight is that the world can be conceived simultaneously as *will*, on the one side, and *representation*, on the other. The world as representation is the world as it appears to the senses and to the mind; the world as will is the world as it is "in-itself", beyond representation. In contrast to the Kantian perspective, Schopenhauer states that the *thing-in-itself* is cognoscible: we ourselves, he states, *experience* it *as will*. This will, which constitutes the ultimate essence of reality, is basically an *overwhelming and blind force towards existence*: a will *to exist* and to *remain in existence* that can be found, according to Schopenhauer, in each being and entity, the Universe being nothing but the battlefield where the many *objectivations* or *instances* of this will "fight" against one another for realization. The will, being a *unique* metaphysical principle, *becomes object* and deploys in a complex hierarchy of multiple phenomena; these phenomena are in a constant, simultaneous struggle towards existence, thus, *self-discordance* is, to Schopenhauer, a prominent characteristic of the essence of the world. In his masterwork, *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer says:

> "In all the grades of its manifestation, from the lowest to the highest, the will (…) always strives, for striving is its sole nature, which no attained goal can put an end to. Therefore, it is not susceptible of any final satisfaction (…) The will is a never satisfied striving, a ceaseless tendency through ever-ascending forms (…) repeated *ad infinitum* — nowhere an end, nowhere a final satisfaction, nowhere a resting-place"[256]

Evoking the doctrine that conflict is the driving force of existence – a doctrine which is already present in the pre-Socratic philosophers (Heraclitus) and, as we have seen, is

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enthusiasm stimulated by scientific and technological developments, material abundance, etc., gave occasion for the idea that "the application of reason to human conditions (…) will ultimately result in melioration of these conditions" (DIENSTAG, 2006, p. 18); that is: it gave occasion to the *idea of progress,* in its Modern form: with an open eternity, a certain kind of optimistic tendency expanded quickly. According to the author, however, philosophical pessimism, which is also a Modern phenomenon, developed in the underground of this process, not as the *opposite* or a *negation* of the idea of progress, but as a challenge to it.

255 LEFRANC (2005), p. 29. Cf. also: SULLY (1877) p. 2.

256 SCHOPENHAUER (2005) V.1 § 56. Translation is ours.

alive in Plato´s conception of human soul in the *Republic,* through the central role of *stasis* which, if what we have stated here is correct, is the leading characteristic of the psychology developed in this dialogue – Schopenhauer says: "the multitude of natural forces and organised forms everywhere strive with each other (…) and thus a constant *internecine war* is waged"[257]. He speaks of an "inner antagonism" and a "universal conflict"[258] and declares:

> "in the fierceness and intensity of its [the Will´s] desire, it buries its teeth in its own flesh, not knowing that it always injures only itself, revealing in this form through the medium of individuation the conflict with itself which it bears in its inner nature"[259]

Humankind appears in this context and undergoes the circumstance also from within: human soul, according to the German philosopher, is a *battleground* where the ever-hungry will expresses in the form of infinite desires that crave to come to be. This recalls Plato´s conception of *to epithumetikón*[260]. To Schopenhauer, reason is nothing but a sophisticated strategy the uncontrollable will develops to win the war for existence; it is not a means of emancipation, but just a "logistical" device. Pleasure and happiness, on the other hand, are conceived by him as negative events, while suffering and longing are, instead, the positive conditions.

In relation to intelligence, specifically, there are two chapters of *The World as Will and Representation* that are of special interest for us: chapter XV, entitled *On the Essential Imperfections of the Intellect*, and Chapter XIX, *On the Primacy of Will in Self-consciousness*. In both of them the author assumes that the will and the intellect are essentially different principles within the, as he puts it, "so-called soul" [261]. In chapter XIX he exposes with great clarity the ways in which the will, with its typical brutality and incontinence, tends naturally to subjugate and make the intellect its slave. The *intellect*, which belongs to the sphere of representation, is conceived as *secondary* and *accidental*, in strong opposition to pure will, which emerges, instead and as we have seen, as the very "thing in itself". Intellect and self-consciousness are ways of being common to all animals and assume a large variety of

257 SCHOPENHAUER Op. Cit. § 27
258 Ibidem. § 28
259 Ibidem. § 63
260 For Schopenhauer, however, eternal lack and voracity define reality both from *outside* and from *inside* human condition. This is a thesis completely alien to Plato´s thought.
261 It is interesting to notice that one of the arguments Schopenhauer uses to establish this difference evokes that used by Plato in *Rep.* IV: "Infants, who show scarcely the first feeble trace of intelligence, are already full of will; though uncontrollable, aimless storming and screaming, they show the pressure of will" (SCHOPENHAUER Op. Cit., V. II, § XIX).

expressions, from the lowest beast up to men and then, again, among men, from stupidity to geniality. The will is presented in this context as a force that "shows a great (…) egoism and lack of consideration for the others, together with emotions springing therefrom"[262], and is described from a psychological point of view with a considerable moral remark. When Schopenhauer states that "the will, as the thing-in-itself, constitutes the inner, true, indestructible nature of man" and that "yet in itself it is without consciousness, for consciousness is conditioned by the intellect, and the intellect is a mere accident of our being"[263], he is saying that human life is, essentially, *signed by irrationality and brutal desire*, and that intelligence is not capable of subverting such a natural order. He severely criticizes the conception according to which the intellect is the "spontaneous leader", the natural directrix of human inner reality and behaviour, and puts it clear: "the master is the will, the servant the intellect". The "fundamental error of all philosophers" is to believe that "thinking is the essential and primary element of the so-called soul" and to put it at first in "man´s inner or spiritual life", in this way performing a terrible inversion[264]. Instead, he suggests that:

> "the *will* is the primary and substantial thing; the *intellect,* on the other hand, is something secondary and additional, in fact a mere tool in the service of the will" [265]

Therefore, within the motivational dynamic, pure, irrational will, rather than intelligence, is the fountain of behaviour. What is more: when they face one another in the internal battlefield of the soul, there is a *neat supremacy of the will over intelligence*. Schopenhauer, who had such eminent friends as Goethe, is well aware of those exceptional cases in which the will is "silenced" by a particularly strong lucidity: in the rare nature of the "genius" (as he puts it), the intellect, which in its own nature is addressed at truth, becomes free from the tyranny of will. Note the Platonic tone of the following passage:

> "The relative predominance of *knowing* over *desiring,* and consequently of the secondary part over the primary, which appears in man, can in certain abnormally favoured individuals go so far that (…) the secondary or knowing part is entirely detached from the *desiring* part and passes into free activity (…) Thus, the knowing part becomes purely objective and the clear mirror of the world, and (…) the *genius* arises*"*

262 SCHOPENHAUER Op. Cit. V.II, § XIX
263 Idem.
264 Idem.
265 Idem.

But Schopenhauer´s *genius*, as Plato´s Philosopher-king, are rarities, exceptions; the rule is, instead, that *will* or *epithumía* prevail violently: "We ought to know that inferior minds are the rule, good minds the exception, eminent minds extremely rare, and genius a portent"[266], and we should come to terms with the fact that "the weakness and imperfection of the intellect is shown in the narrow-mindedness, perversity and folly of the great majority"[267].

But Schopenhauer extends his analysis: it is not only as a result of the pressure of the will that the intellect gets corrupted: there are many failures of the *thinking part* itself. He criticizes conceptual knowledge, for example, by pointing out that "the comprehension of the many and the various into one representation is possible only through concept, that is, by omitting the differences (…) so, the concept is a very imperfect way of representing things", and adds that thinking has an inborn tendency towards distraction, that it is "not stationary, but fleeting", successive and fragmented, as well as prone to oblivion and tiredness. When concentration is achieved, the intellect cannot maintain the focus for a long time – like the eye, when it fixates at something, "through long-continued rumination on one thing (…) our thinking becomes confused and dull, and end in complete stupor"[268].

At this stage of the research, we have gathered enough evidence of the proximity between the theories of the "founder of philosophical pessimism" and some ideas developed by Plato in the *Republic.* Thus, we may be in a good position to answer the questions with which we opened this section: to what extent is it appropriate to use the term "pessimism" in relation to Plato's thought and, in particular, in relation to the content of the *Republic*? In a similar extent in which tradition uses it in relation to Schopenhauer's thought, namely: an extent related, above all (even if not exclusively), to the limitations of human intelligence, its disadvantages regarding the irrational components of the soul, the power of those very elements and the role of self-disagreement in inner life. What is, after all, *pessimism*? Philosophical pessimism is a critical conceptual device headed, among other things, at criticizing the idea of an intellectually knowable essence of reality and of rationalism as an ever-standing soteriological power. In this context of proximity between Schopenhauer´s and Plato´s thoughts, it is interesting to highlight the following passages:

> "Plato says: "The things of this world, perceived by our senses, have no true being at all; they are always becoming, but they never are. They have only a relative being; they are together only in and through their

266 SCHOPENHAUER Op. Cit. V.II, § XV
267 Ibidem. § XIX
268 Ibidem. § XV

> relation to one another; hence their whole existence can just as well be called a non-being. Consequently, they are likewise not objects of a real knowledge (*episteme*), for there can be such a knowledge only of what exists in and for itself, and always in the same way. On the contrary, they are only the object of an opinion or way of thinking, brought about by sensation (a mere opinion formed by means of irrational sense perception). As long as we are confined to perception, we are like persons sitting in a dark cave, and bound so fast that they cannot even turn their heads. They see nothing but the shadowy outlines of actual things that are led between them and a fire which burns behind them; and by the light of this fire these shadows appear on the wall in front of them. Even of themselves and of one another they see only the shadows on this wall. Their wisdom would consist in predicting the sequence of those shadows learned from experience. On the other hand, only the real archetypes of those shadowy outlines, the eternal Ideas, the original forms of all things, can be described as truly existing (*ontos on*), since they always are but never become and never pass away. No plurality belongs to them; for each by its nature is only one, since it is the archetype itself, of which all the particular, transitory things of the same kind and name are copies or shadows; no coming into existence and no passing by belong to them, for they are truly being or existing, but are never becoming or vanishing like their fleeting copies (…) Thus, only of them can there be a knowledge in the proper sense, for the object of such a knowledge can be only that which always and in every respect (and hence in-itself) is, not that which is and then again is not, according as we look at it". This is Plato's teaching"[269]

And:

> "If Plato´s teaching (…) had ever been properly understood and grasped; if men had truly and earnestly reflected on [its] inner meaning and content (…) instead of lavishly using the technical expressions (…) and parodying the style (…) they could not have failed long ago to discover (…) its true significance. Not only would they have refrained from constantly comparing Plato with Leibniz, on whom his spirit certainly did not rest (…) as if they wanted to mock at the manes of the great thinker of antiquity, but in general they would have gone much farther than they did"[270]

Final thoughts

Plato has given an important role to irrational forces within the soul; he had noticed their ferocity, drawing the many-headed beast of the *Republic* and picturing it along with the brute nature of emotions in the figure of a lion. In a way very closely related to the father of philosophical pessimism, he had stressed that fulfilment is something that does not correspond

269 SCHOPENHAUER Op. Cit. V.II, § XV
270 Ibidem. V.I, § XXXI

to appetitive nature – the many-headed beast of the *Republic* and the leaky jar of the *Gorgias* could perfectly be read together with "the wheel of Ixion, the (…) sieve of the Danaids, and (…) the eternally thirsting Tantalus" quoted by Schopenhauer to characterize the will[271] – and draw from this several conclusions regarding morality and even politics. Schopenhauer´s *will* and Plato´s *epithumía* are not equivalent concepts (in fact, Schopenhauer´s *will* may well be assimilated to the compound of the appetitive *and* the spirited elements of the tripartite soul); however, they have much in common: besides insatiability and ferocity, both are related to *conflict*. The place assigned to psychic *stasis*, the emphasis on the ravenous character of irrational passions and the power, but mainly the *limited* power of man´s dowry, namely, rationality and intelligence, is recognized by both philosophers. Even if their ultimate metaphysics, psychologies and ethics differ strongly, in structure and content, it seems to be sufficiently clear that, from a broad perspective, that they both share a *pessimistic* view. But we must as well highlight that despite his pessimistic diagnosis, Plato´s *Republic* moves also, and with great impetus, towards *utopia.* This is something that does not happen at all in Schopenhauer´s writings, which, for the most, are not very preoccupied with political issues and conclude that suffering is the essence of life, being the aesthetic experience of the beautiful, in art and in nature, the better way to cope with it.

In any case, we have reached a point where there seem to be sufficient and strong reasons to support the thesis of a platonic pessimism. Thus, we are back to the point where we began: the problematic coexistence of pessimism and utopia in Plato´s *Republic*. How is it possible for both to co-exist? And what could be the significance of such a co-existence?

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271 SCHOPENHAUER, WWR, § 38

CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS

We have argued here that Plato´s *Republic* is an odd utopia because it develops a twofold paradigm – psychological and political – of a better life that might be possible but, simultaneously, advances, implicitly and explicitly, a set of positions of pessimistic nature that challenge the efficiency and even the desirability of that very paradigm. That the coexistence between utopia and pessimism is possible without necessarily leading to incongruity or contradiction is shown by the dialogue itself and mainly by the fact that, at its end, the reader (or, at least, *some* reader) is neither completely persuaded of the actual utility of the ideal, but nor of its idleness. Instead, he ends up in a particular state of mind, which we have described here as *hesitation*. For instance, in relation to the psychological ideal, he could well consider the following issue: philosophical deliberation indicates that rational eudaimonology is not an *overall* satisfactory alternative for the achievement of a good life; however, it also shows that it has a great potential to deal with some difficulties and promote a *better* life. Thus, a challenge is imposed: the reader faces the need to *reflect more* on its costs and benefits, on what adjustments could be made to maximize the latter and reduce the former, to consider to what extent an approximation to the ideal would bring that betterment without excessive prejudice over other spheres of existence, and so on. Socrates´ closing words point precisely to this: *if* we follow his advice, he declares, we *may be* dear to ourselves and to the gods (621c). This is to say that the inquire is open to further consideration, that *we* need to carry out such consideration to make a decision and, perhaps, to do an experiment. In any case, there is a long reflexive way waiting to be performed when the end of the dialogue is reached. This is why we claimed that the *Republic* is an open work, a work-in-progress, a hypothesis… and not a full, final and definitive philosophy or "project". This, we claimed, is one of the most fundamental results and significances of the coexistence between utopia and pessimism. Pessimism does not lead to the abandonment of the effort of constructing a model; instead, it is the force that pushes the model so that it becomes increasingly complex and, above all, more aligned with the real conditions – and limitations – of existence. This alignment brings the most serious difficulties, but: what is philosophy, if not a tool to deal with complexity and difficulties? Every new idea about possible betterment is scrutinized. Many other examples of this scrutiny than the ones offered up to now could still be developed. For example: the ideal of self-government is accompanied by the

lucidity of self-slavery and expounded as a paradox; the proposals for specific changes to be made to achieve the political ideal come in three "waves", before each of them, there is a warning about its dangerousness and ambivalence. In the *Republic*, Plato confronts us with a set of especially tragic or dramatic facts that belong to human nature and condition (such as the impossibility of giving a rational answer in relation to what the ultimate good is, the fact that ignorance and internal instability are prominent characteristics of our condition, etc); still, he (and, together with him, we, readers) perpetuates the struggle to think about how to face such facts, not through escapism or evasion, but through an honest theoretical assimilation not only of them, but also of the restrictions and even the negative aspects of the proposed alternatives to deal with them. It is in this sense that we speak of resilience.

Resilience is a relatively new concept. It was born in the XIXth century, in the context of engineering, as the capacity of a material, mechanism or system to respond, absorb and recover from damage without suffering complete collapse. In the XXth century, the concept began to be used in other fields, especially psychology, sociology and ecology. In close connection with notions such as vulnerability, perturbation, crisis and trauma, it came to refer to the capacity of individuals, communities, societies and systems to withstand and respond to adversity by restoring previous states (in fact, the word comes from the Latin *resilio*, which means to rebound, to go back) but, also and fundamentally, by developing new skills that enable them not only to keep functioning, but to evolve. The idea of "adaptive resilience" has just been born, and it is gaining and is gaining an increasing appreciation in many areas of knowledge. After our study, perhaps we have gathered enough reasons to suggest that the extension of the concept to the scope of philosophical thought and, more precisely, of utopian thought in its philosophical mode is pertinent. Philosophical resilience, within the utopian framework, could be understood as the ability *of critical thinking* to assimilate the adversities revealed by its own development and to project a possible future from the successful assimilation of such adversities. For all that has been expounded up to now, Plato's *Republic* could be considered a good example of such a capacity.

In any case, a less polemic conclusion, and one for which we believe we have given enough arguments in this work, is the one already advanced several times throughout it: Plato´s *Republic* is the first great work of utopianism ever written in Western literature, but it is *also* the first great critique to utopianism ever written in Western literature. In this sense, it is a remarkable example of how philosophy can contribute to the search for a better future.

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